

ANDY BRIERLEY'S BLOG

Hello Shipmates,

In my last letter I mentioned a 102 year old Engineer Officer crossing the bar. Another who crossed last month, also at the magic number of 102 years, Lt. R.N.V.R. Eric Worsley. He was science master At Thetford Grammar School. Called up in late 1940 to be told he was now a bomb disposal officer.

Training for that expertise was a ten day course, during which he watched a German bomb being dismantled - disarmed. I would hazard a guess that's no longer than the current course by Health and Safety Exec. on how to clean a paint brush in a can of solvent! Immediately thrown in the deep end making Pompey safe following the spate of air raids, plus many within the barracks proper!

One pierced a shelter full of W.R.E.N.s who tiptoed round it when Eric arrived, to thank their lucky stars. A heavy work load saw him decorated twice within 8 months - George Medal + M.B.E.. Issued with a Norton motor bike as personal transport was stopped by police for speeding on several occasions.

An order was issued he be given a 'white painted helmet' denoting he was on an urgent mission allowing him to proceed with 'the utmost dispatch' (R.N. speak). He survived to be de-mobbed then lectured in physics at Hull University. He is recorded as playing tennis at 100, a Yorkshire man from Hessle and an acknowledged man of the first order.

I learn that July 25th is that annual day of seafarers. - their motto 'Seafarers Matter'. They do make a unique contribution to world economy, International trade and Civil Society. The slogan says everything about the Merchant marine who, I believe, initiated that date.

Made me wonder about a recent sinking in the South Atlantic of a vessel, cargo 260.000 tons on iron ore, out of Brazil for China. Vessel was South Korean with officers from that country and Malaya, bulk of the rest Philipinos. Only 2 survived.

They would be on long hours with little leave at home, paid a pittance. The two survivors said the hull 'simply cracked open'. Size of load is breath-taking, over length of vessel. It was of 19 other V.L.O.C.s built in 1993 that began life as tankers 'before conversion.

One cannot escape the thought that conversion was a major contributor to the disaster, and more can be expected at such loads.

Cruise liner owner, Fred Olsen stretched three of his small liners by, I think, 30 meters. I've been on two and could not resist walking the quayside to find the joints, see weld quality; not scared, just interested. No sign of modification was visible on the inside!

To me Chatham Dockyard was better than Aladdin's cave. One could disappear for hours and days on end into workshops - seeing who was in dry dock etc., visit the shipwright's cavernous shed with a memorable smell of high quality wood being worked. one dock of major interest was where Cavalier now sits.

The Guppy programme for subs. (greater underwater propulsion) was getting underway. Sub. was severed, a short distance before conning tower, and pulled apart on blocks for insertion of a 'double battery space' - hence the programme name. Was a mind-boggler at the time, to witness. Have heard say that, with advanced battery technology, the programme was a raging success.

The nuke sub. ear was well after my time but I ever wonder if the wonderful 'hammer head crane', over that pair of docks, was the one used to withdraw the cruisers 6 turrets at the St. Mary's Side of 3 basin, a splendid sight!

Many photos exist of dockyard work, but never seen one of that event. I feel that wonderful crane was reduced to scrap when D'YD closed. What an attraction it would make today if given the same treatment as the 'hammer head' that sat at John Brown's yard on the Clyde.

A lift to the top, which is modified into a 'safe walkway viewing platform, Glasgow's rival to the London Eye, at a fraction of the cost; the view, incidentally, would be looking over the scene of the Dutch raid on our fleet - breaking the 'chain boom' to Upnor Castle, towing our flagship back to Holland after burning the rest of the fleet. Kipling has a lovely poem of the incident, which had its anniversary only a couple of days ago. Celebrations in Holland of De Ruyter's victory was celebrated here also.

A magnanimous gesture I feel. Closure of the yard brought scenes of monumental waste and wanton destruction of priceless industrial artefacts, greed for scrap swamped all thought of preservation. This, in spite of knowledge that a large portion of that place was destined to be a 'National Heritage site. I say, if one kept a low profile, to show interest in a 'maties' job was always met with friendly response, a demonstration or explanation, not only the heavy stuff but 'upholstery', sign writing, badge casting or copper-smithing - you name it, Chatham did it.

The 38th president of the United States, Gerald R Ford did his combat duty on a 'Woolworth's carrier' in the pacific during W.W 2, U.S.S. Monterey.

First of a new design of proper 'super carrier', nuclear powered, weighing in at 1000.000 tons (U.S.), is named after that president (C V N 78). A weeks' sea trials behind it she appears a quantum jump ahead of all current stuff. They claim 25 more aircraft launches with 25% fewer crew. What excites me about it is the first installation of what's called E.M.A.L.S (electromagnetic launch system) - Catapults.

The big U. S. carriers have all had four catapults supported by a standalone 'steam generation system' to meet massive demand for steam when flying off at full tilt. The weight, complexity vulnerability and space demands high up in the hull could only be a design headache. Nukes makes electricity in abundance, so to run a cable up the decks to new system must make

designer' builders feel it's Christmas every day, a massive bonus in weight, space, complexity of steam pipes all saved in one hit.

A shed load of years ago I recall seeing, on a B.B.C. science programme, Professor Laithweight of a northern university, demonstrate with a model, a wheel-less friction train that completely eclipsed Stevenson's Rocket - later years saw a development of an artillery piece (rail gun) that needs no powder explosive to eject the shell. This R & D is still on-going. The E.M.A.L.S system seems to have elements of both. I wish for its massive success. Another feature that pleases the eye for form and function is the 'uncluttered island' that is smaller and fitted further aft.

It would be most interesting to hear the design teams of G. R. Ford and our Rosyth offerings 'make their cases' for such radically differing bridge designs. Why our two monstrosities on deck edge?

Been off the pen and ink for a few days. Something I touched on in my last letter, namely oaths sworn by M. P.s. I found, in his young days, Benjamin Disraeli, later to become Prime Minister (1868) was not even eligible to be an M. P. as he was Jewish!, so unable to swear the M .P.s oath - i.e. 'on the true faith of a Christian'.

Must say that leaves plenty of latitude, which they exploit to the full.... This day, 11th June (1770) Captain James Cook of Whitby ran into the Great Barrier Reef holing the *Endeavour*. You already know J.C. was a superb seaman, saved his ship and crew to sail countless more thousands of miles.

It is a fact David Scott, pilot of command module Apollo 15 named his craft *Endeavour*, after Captain Cook's vessel, for the moon mission.

Whilst in the Culture section, my earlier mention of that Kipling poem made me go and look it out. Being all about Chatham & Medway, plus the navy's parlous state, it fits our situation this very day (copy below), hope you like verse.

The Dutch in the Medway

If wars were won by feasting,
Or victory by song,
Or safety found in sleeping sound,
How England would be strong!
But honour and dominion
Are not maintained so.
They're only got by sword and
shot,
And this the Dutchmen know!
The moneys that should feed us
You spend on your delight,

How can you then have sailor-men
To aid you in your fight?
Our fish and cheese are rotten,
Which makes the scurvy grow -
We cannot serve you if we starve,
And this the Dutchmen know!
Our ships in every harbour
Be neither whole nor sound,
And, when we seek to mend a leak,
No oakum can be found;
Or, if it is, the caulkers,
And carpenters also,

For lack of pay have gone away,
And this the Dutchmen know!
Mere powder, guns, and bullets,
We scarce can get at all;
Their price was spent in
merriment
And revel at Whitehall,
While we in tattered doublets
From ship to ship must row,
Beseeching friends for odds and
ends -
And this the Dutchmen know!

I wished to mention Cdr. David Repard, but fear you have had enough for any old bit of stuff - so, next time eh?!

(There will be an article on David Repard published in next October's issue - Editor)

Tatty Bye Shipmates, be aware of white van man!

