



ANDY BRIERLEY'S BLOG

Hello Shipmates,

I was visiting the sail maker on Gillingham pier, the side parallel with the dockyard. The paddler *Medway Queen* is still tied up there under long-term restoration. By the looks of things 'quality work' is the volunteer's hall mark; why this project has never been given a berth within the Historic Dockyard defeats reason.

I suspect the usual conditions prevail i.e. 'who has the power over what?' Dockyard hierarchy are on public purse, old *Queen Volunteers* attend most local functions with their begging bowls, to keep her afloat and alive.

Whilst down there I could not resist a walk to the pier's end looking left at the dockyard entrance locks towards basin No. 1.

The local paper says *Peel Ports*, the owners, are planning to abandon the entire yard now, for residential use. With no alternative jobs you may imagine a chill wind blows there.

What was the enormous boat shed with its lovely smell of high quality timber being worked in all conceivable ways is now replaced with a huge rectangular tower block up to level five already. Last time I got a look in there one of the old naval pinnaces was being rebuilt, the sort with a small upright, one-man wheel house on deck, snug cabin on rear, out of wind and rain.

The first example I saw was on the pier at Shotley, used to tow a string of cutters out past Felixstowe for the weekly 'pull a mile - sail a mile' race. It still had the small 'compound steam engine', stoker on his stool, visible when peeping down the centre hatch. It was nimble and those cutters no mean weight, to my eye appearance was just like a miniature tug boat.

Long back, a couple of the most memorable vessels; I went down the pier to see undock No. 1, *H.M.S. Triumph* in charge of two tugs en route to the breaker's yard, Turkey. She was my first proper ship, joined Med Fleet as it was Flag Officer Air, two carriers there at the time, the other being *Ocean*. In its later years *Triumph* was converted to a 'repair' ship, languished in basin No. 1 for a long, long time.

A close friend had a brother-in-law on board, a one-ring engineer - so I became the owner of a nice rectangular copper temperature recorder, clockwork - from close range pom-pom magazine; a fate more fitting than a Turkish scrapper's non-ferrous pot. Should you visit me at home it's in the conservatory, ready for you to wind up, whilst lamenting, our realms, old navy. Vessel No. 2, recalled so well, *Jeremiah O'Brian Liberty* ship saved from scrapping, as ever, preserved and returned to original by a band of old retired merchant mariners in San Francisco. It berths on south side of *Golden Gate*, Pacific side, smack alongside an arch. I first saw it tied up, as towed from a long line of derelicts miles up the bay in a marsh area.

With y'all, I first visited that place courtesy of H.M.Q. on *Superb*. Of course said *Liberty* was not in that latter location at that time. But fate took me back several times on a business visa plus workers ticket. I never resisted a drive down to view the progress. Empty gun tub's regained de-activated 5" mounts, as did all Oerlikan 20 mm tubs around the bridge structure.

Years elapsed and eventually a date of significance brought it back over the Atlantic for a D-Day. It spent a couple of days in Chatham dockyard for checks and 'tweaks', bunkering etc. before departing for Cherbourg en route back across the pond, via Panama and the Pacific, to her regular bridge berth.

Anyway, I was on the end of Gillingham pier with a camera as she undocked; a splendid sight, as if first built, the crew all old 'Merch' Mariners, happy to give a joyful 'thank you' shouted across the gap; half a dozen miles down Medway to pass their sister ship's remains still poking up off Sheerness, a crystal clear picture in the mind's eye. You all know sister ship is remains of the *Richard Montgomery*.

I was reading about the Frigate Factory, so called, being constructed in Rosyth dockyard; it is scheduled to build five (5) type 31 frigates. Main contractor, as ever, is B. A. Rosyth. A developed **cynic** from past observations of performance. I do not hold my breath. It took eight years and six billion sterling to construct two merchant pattern hulls, calling them 'Super Carriers'. It's pretty obvious no Henry Kaiser is within one thousand miles of the set up at Firth of Forth - that really would be expecting too much.

I am in awe of the energy and drive of the person who, by training, was a civil engineer. Getting the 'bit between his teeth' at the start of March 1941, he had the hull in water before even the tank tests of the hull were finished. Oregon Shipbuilders built 322 of them in three years from 65 - yup 65 - slipways, the last completed in February 1944. Oregon S.B employed 35,000 workers by then, and the archive states, with pride, 31% of them were female, their welding, generally, being of superior quality to the men.

That was put down to them being more attentive, excellent students and newly released from apron strings to the work place. In my view Henry K's ace-in-the-hole was paying the ladies exactly what men got, in like for like work; a most unusual thing at that time.

Get your magnifying glass out and view the car park.



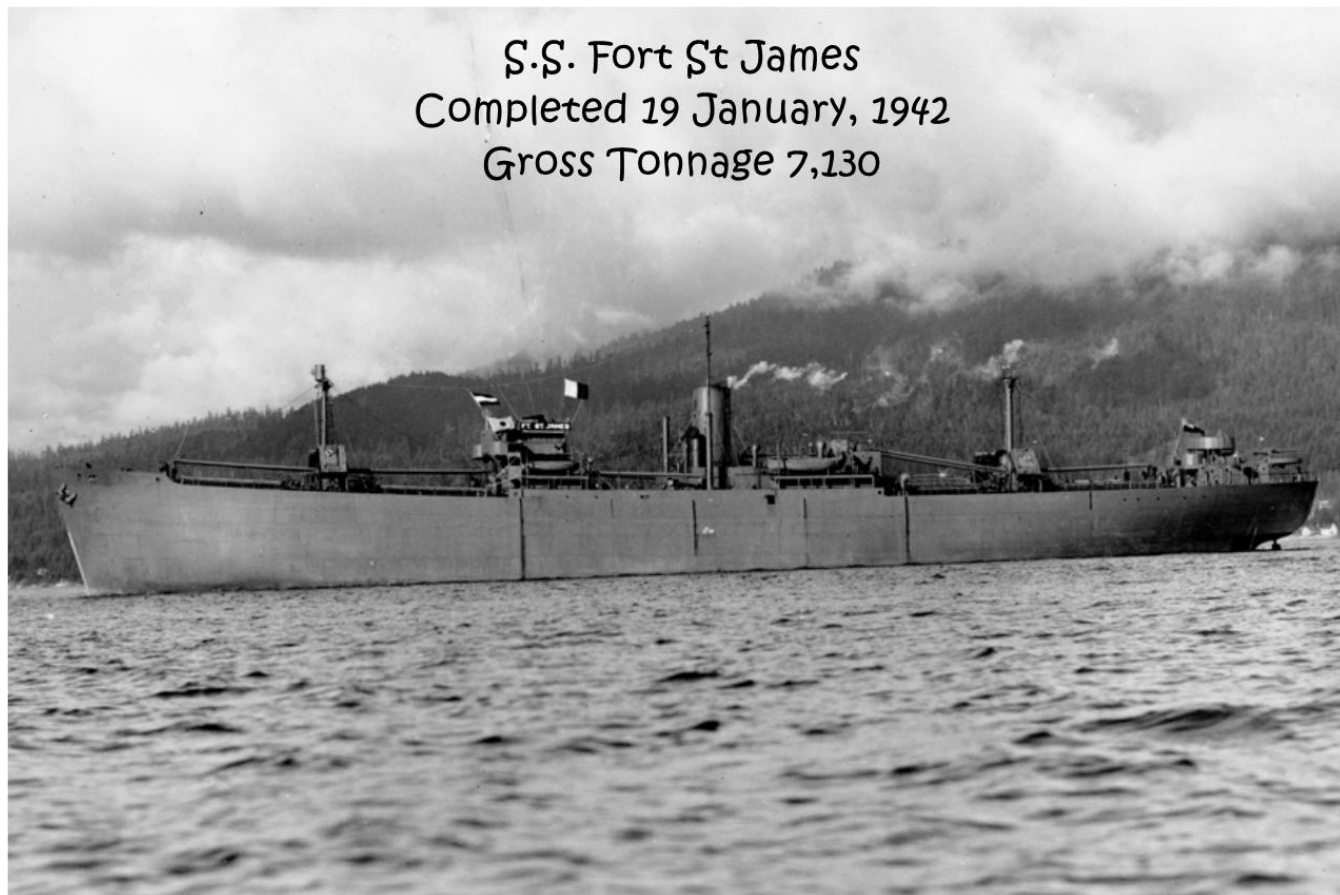
Many ground level pictures exist; this is the only one I've seen from the air and just 'a part' of the yard. I see pictures as saving me a page of blether, knowing your wandering eye will glean all I have to say.....

Next, a decent picture of what were called *Fort Boats*. Their build programme started in Canada, eventually funded by Roosevelt's lease lend. The drawings came from Thompson and Sons, Sunderland; their north sands yard.

The very basic difference between Canadian built *Forts* and American built *Oceans* type vessels is that *Forts* are all riveted; U.S. types used Welding method throughout. Scotch boilers fitted to both types meant coal or oil fuel could be used with both tanks and bunkers built in.

The first Fort off the slip way at Burrard dry dock of Vancouver was named *Fort St. James*; she survived the great struggle, following a host of name changes and owners, was broken up at

Osaka, Japan in 1960. You may be familiar with the stories of *Liberties* unzipping along weld lines in rough seas; some resulting in total loss. Of initial order for 60 vessels of 10,000 DWT *Fort* type, none are recorded meeting the same fate; was it rivets, or suspect welding before the technique to build for excess stress was worked out properly?



Guess your eyes are glazed over by now, all these ships a-building... Try month's Sabbatical but keep your muzzle on.

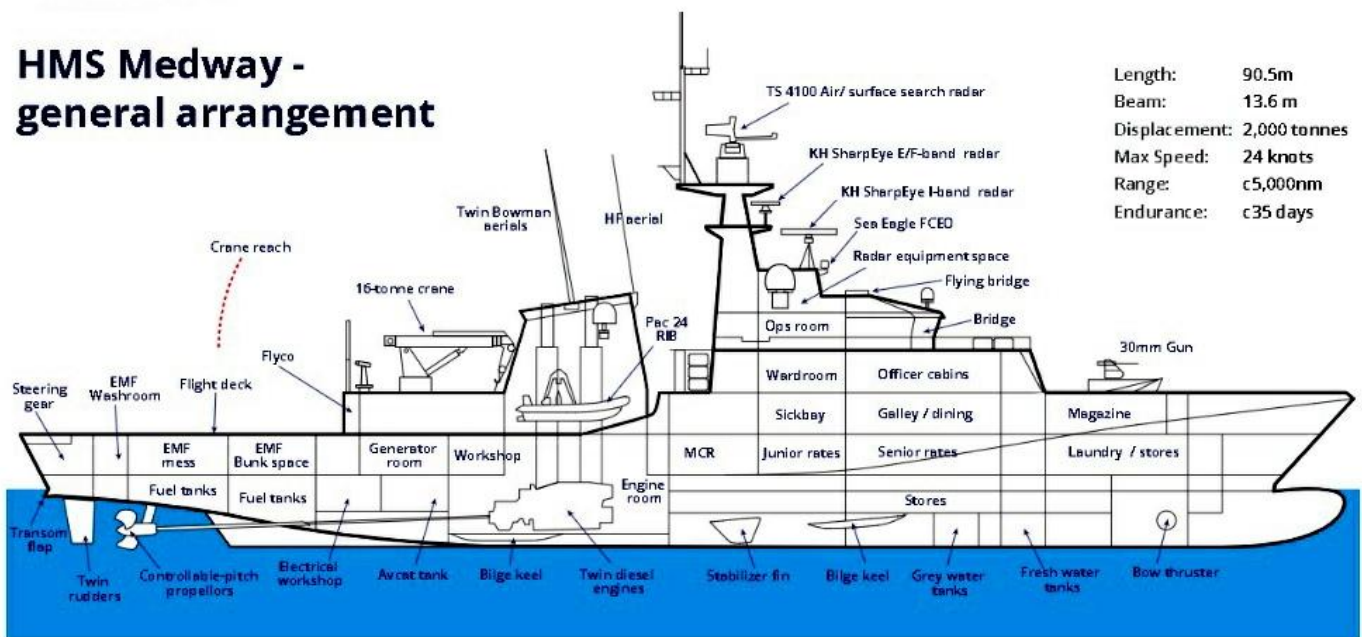
AND ANOTHER THING . . .

A report on recruitment published last week has the army in a perilous state. The Royal Navy is the next in line unable to adequately man its vessels; cited as prime reason for the sale of *Ocean* to Brazil. I claim to live less than a handful of miles from a garrison town - i.e. Chatham, current home of the Royal Engineering School. I traverse that urban utopia frequently but cannot recall what year it was I last saw a young chap in khaki, ironed and polished, out and about in town.



The last vessel to visit ex-Dockyard was *O.P.V. Medway*, brand new on a Show the Flag in basin No. 2. To see it up close was not possible, a wall of sea containers had been erected; I suspect to keep terrorists at bay. Those fellows need not have worried; the main attribute of class constructed by B.A.E. Clyde is they leak like granny's colander.

HMS Medway - general arrangement



I did not see a square rigged body come or go during my visit, or officer even. This was late Saturday morning on a very nice day; where were they? - still a-bed? - ashore?

The R.A.F. was noticeable in not getting a mention in any news print, an irrelevance, I guess, devoid of strategic purpose.

The promised Strategic Defence Review when present government was settled in has been deferred, now yet again held over till an indeterminate time in the future (Covid I guess).

The act by Westminster forbidding service personnel to venture forth from barracks - off ships, in the appropriate uniform I see as neutering the very best recruiting tool in the box. Shipmates ashore in No 1's, mood happy, attitude carefree, primed and preened, behaving like the world is their oyster, seen by local maidens - or otherwise - as the key to an exciting new gene pool, worth a flirt.

As a Jan 31st baby seeing my elder brother home, with contemporaries if lucky, was the reason for the need to rapidly complete education, then away with the R.N. to pastures new.

Instead we dole out countless millions to half hard public service companies and adopt a national policy, a gutless scared posture, hide away your prime asset and the bogey man won't get you. Name another state with such an attitude! Just one?

Would you agree the Submarine Service claim to be elite of the Royal Navy? When at sea on operations, 'being in harm's way' is their daily diet, most of their hours absent from public eye. It is a hard task master of family life deserving of all possible support. Our once magnificent Fleet Air Arm suffered its death knell under Prime Minister Cameron.

Our R.N. Admirals allowed R.A.F lobbying to emasculate it, then go on to bastardise it, twice, since WW1 ceased; it beggars belief.

Now, the R.A.F. has a future Air Superiority project underway. Surprise! Their interest in the F.A.A. is being side-lined; the reports, as ever, according to R.A.F. sources. I would enquire once more what the hell does R.N top braid do? Besides never fighting their own corner.

One thing the Submarine Service seems to excel at is cocaine use; a big case at King's Bay Georgia when a nuke boomer was collecting its compliment of Poseidon rockets gained lots of media mileage. Captains and female officers frequently in trouble for engaging more closely. A shocker reported at length in the Daily Mail in early February was: 'Seaman and his girlfriend, Seawoman, running their own porn site'. Seawoman's speciality; full-on shots of naughty bits, plus for 'real fare payers' inventive sexual gymnastics by the couple; both parties named and pictured in the paper (not whilst performing).

When the site became common knowledge a naval investigation enquiry checked it out. The lady was frank and honest, cooperated fully. The enquiry team judged it was all above board with no violations of K.I's and A.I's, so - carry on carrying on - unencumbered by what I can only surmise is their fan club at the M.O.D.

Scotland's desire to leave the union gains prominence by the day. First Minister Sturgeon makes all possible capital out of the Irish border problems following Brexit; it's what opposing politicians do of course. Representing the best interests of the masses an alien concept.

The proposed military review has the army reduced to 10,000 bodies. A major step to achieve it is disbanding The Black Watch; to me a step beyond the pale. I can imagine how the news will go down north of Hadrian's; do the powers that be expect Sturgeon to tolerate such an iniquity.

A newsprint report heaping praise on the R.N. during the slave trade period; very relevant with the Woke cult rampant, hell bent on the destruction of U.K. history. The report was by that, reviled by some and so called 'petrol head' Jeremy Clarkson; Farmer, long time fan of the Royal Navy and author, an outstanding article to my mind. It's shown at the end of this magazine for those interested. (Click [HERE](#) to read it.)

I will find our current governor of the village junior school and ask if it could be read out at story time. Should the school staff be of the current military mindset it will be straight into the waste paper basket.

Covid has played hell with village postage, both in and out over the longest period I can remember; the post always got through, but it's been bought and sold a couple of times leaving visible the dead hand of bean counters pervading that vaulted organisation. One card from Greenwich to here took a month.

I was called to Age Concern on last Saturday in January with Jo for a Covid job. The crew, all volunteers, highly organised and cheerful; could tell they were not 'Men from the Ministry'.

I am going to lick and stick - see how long this takes to get to France for typing up. Be safe and observe the rules, I smell a possibility of reunion's booking space at King's Charlie.

See you there eh?

