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CHAIRMAN OF THE ASSOCIATION, BRIAN SAUNDERS

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Superb - Defending Britain Since 1710

ANDY BRIERLEY'S BLOG

Hello Shipmates,

I was reading of submarine loss in the Med., mines, seemed as greater hazard as Axis sub hunters'. What seemed an odd parallel event was Donitz, grand master of U-boat operations lost his officer son in a U-boat sinking.

Undoubtedly Walker's greatest triumph was a patrol in February 1944 when his ships sank six U-boats. Three of the kills were made within a three hour period – proof of the efficacy of Walker's efforts. Here he stands on the bridge of HMS STARLING on 25 February 1944 acknowledging the welcome from a crowd of sailors and Wrens – and the First Lord of the Admiralty himself.

The grand master of U-boat hunting – Captain F John Walker of 2nd Support Group, also lost his officer son serving in submarine *Parthian*, mined in the Med. Walker's loss was made known to him on return from one of his highly successful forays that killed three U-boats; he rammed *U 119* in *Starling* – she was sent back to Liverpool for a bow rebuild. Captain Walker was transferred to *Magpie* and found three more U-boats on the surface; *U 462* and *U 504* which were the large *Milchcow* types dispatched by action of 4" guns; very important kills that curtailed the wolf pack fuel and torpedo reserves. The third U-boat was dispatched by a *Short Sunderland* by aerial depth charge.

I rate the portrait sculpture of Captain Walker on Liverpool pier head as one of the Royal Navy's finest monuments; particularly like it being on a low plinth climbed upon by visiting

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youngsters. 'Who he is' in large print round the base, easily read by first year readers; they will know of him by default.

A Nelsonian character who did 'engage the enemy more closely'; a passed-over captain, not being of fashionable gunnery discipline; in Dartmouth Cadet Days top of his class.

A surprise to me looking into his past, he was deputy to Admiral Ramsey of Dover Command on Operation Dynamo, organising the Dunkirk evacuation. His sub hunting prowess plus teaching his group captains earned him a D.S.O. to compliment a Mentioned in Dispatches for the Dunkirk work. Thereafter he earned regular bars to his D.S.O. – 3 in number.

I have seen it written he was to be knighted, by popular acclaim, but alas, whilst on holiday with his wife he died; just 48 years old. The autopsy had the cause as 'overwork plus stress'. He was buried at sea from Liverpool on the destroyer *Hesperus*. I picked up an obscure little picture book, half a life-time ago, that records the passing of a real Captain of the Sea; it looks as if the Entire Northern Command were present, a measure of his worth!

I felt the need to share these pictures with you, if space and content fit editorial needs.

I have another picture of Walker on the job of peering through an azimuth ring on the bridge; those without duffle coats, all wavy navy. I am intrigued by 'two binnacles'; is that because he is group leader? Or am I stupid and should know?

The moment of committal: Walker's widow and daughter Gillian (in Wrens uniform) stand directly behind the coffin.

Operation Dynamo (Dunkirk) did bring a prickly gent into our lives; General de Gaulle. His speech to the French homeland via the BBC was important and no mistake. He was a driven person, devoid of gratitude to any organisation or power, largesse from the United States, when they joined the fray, was particularly bountiful, yet he was still unable to be respectful to President Roosevelt, whose dislike for Le Grand Charles was no mystery to other Heads of State.

From this distance it's hard to determine if his autocratic manner was a major reason that of 100,000 French troops evacuated only 3000 elected to stay in Britain with him; the rest returned to Brest, Le Havre and Cherbourg. Equally he was instrumental in taking all Polish troops and airmen, who had already fought in Europe, under his umbrella. They were seasoned, disciplined, highly trained with a blood lust coupled to experience of the wily Hun.

Still with France, their defence ministry has just published an illustration of their future aircraft carrier, expected to displace 75,000 tonnes, and one and a half times the size of the current *Charles de Gaulle* carrier; a strike force of 30 'next generation' jets (home designed and built). The eleventh carrier to join the French navy; nuclear powered in step with the nation's emissions strategy, to be built by Naval Group of St. Nazaire it appears to have current development of a bulbous bow to assist her 440 megawatts achieve 30 knots with triple screws.

The artist's impression shows a proper 4 catapult flight deck and arrester wires, all EMAL's system; minimal bridge, control structure. The whole shooting match light years away from 'Political build of super carriers from Rosyth', diesel driven white pachyderms, famous already for uncontrollable leaking. The St. Nazaire yard is Europe's largest, coupled to a world-class

reputation for quality and budget keeping.

Another, sadder, carrier story is the fate of *USS Bonhomme Richard*. About to complete a modernisation costing $250 million; fire broke out on board burning for four days. The

USS BONHOMME RICHARD ON FIRE AT NAVAL BASE SAN DIEGO ON 12 JULY 2020.
[US NAVY]

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agonising decision to scrap was taken; the projected cost of repairs being $3.5 billion. Anything usable is to be stripped to help maintain the rest of the valuable WASP class.

I recall last year Russian carrier *Kunetzov* was ablaze in dry dock with so much water pumped in it collapsed the entire dry dock. Russia has announced all will be righted and rebuilt; thought of cost involved would bankrupt many small nations.

Back in la belle France, on the Atlantic coast, a nuclear hunter-killer submarine caught fire during a mid-life rebuild, middle of last year. The French navy agonised about rebuild costs. A hull integrity survey saved the submarine – whose name my brain will not drag up – (*Perle* is the name; fire was in October 2020. Ed.) – she was made seaworthy and has been, maybe is being, towed around to Toulon for renewal – so, bless all who sail in her as, thankfully, no life was reported lost, not as the case with U.S. Wasp Class which, I understand, lost eight crew; of course no mention of casualties are given by the Russian dockyard.

Being aware of the small fortunes involved in corrective measures following refit fires, one would have thought a substantial proportion of costs would be allocated to 'fire wardens' to monitor, day and night, those notorious sparkers, cutting gear and grinders, especially at night when the usual smoulder breaks into flame. Looking from the other end of the telescope, 'what's the cost of one life plus knock-on expenses?'

I thought the biggest analysis of what was wrong with our ships in the Falklands was why they burned so readily. The answer's of high interest to navies round the world, yet we all seem to make the same mistakes for ourselves – before the lesson is learned.

Boy !, that's a bit heavy – I shall fall back on this year's excuse, *Lockdown Syndrome.*

So, the spring's trani joke --- Have you ever been abroad? No, I've been a guy all my life.

Deep groan!!!! AHHHH

But I feel an upside today as we all have been inoculated; three hurrahs for that.

It did not seem to cause much of a stir last month when Porton Down or its Annexe was reported, in a delayed event release, to have conducted 'covert chemical' trials on public crowds, in railway stations, sports events and the like. The minimal dosage was calculated not to do real hurt to individuals? but had measurable results; it was to assist development of battle field disabling gases and stuff of that nature. I glibly assumed such conduct did not occur in leading democracies; surely trials need sanction from government of the day!

A few weeks later, the foregoing once again raised the question of use made of the service personnel at nuclear test sites. One lady tells of her husband, a boy seaman in 1956, when a device was detonated on Montebello Island, northwest of Australia, the crew were simply told to turn their backs, protective garb being non-existent.

In 1963, the lady tells, he was on Christmas Island assisting in the disposal of vehicles and equipment. Subsequently, aged 41, his hip bones crumpled, he had chronic gastric problems, bowel cancer plus a collapsed lung. His early death left a son with testicular cancer at 20; the lady's grand child was born missing a thyroid gland.

A harrowing tale that the consultant considered nuclear involvement was the root of all his medical problems. We are aware that physical disintegration killed thousands in Japan following their 'nuke bombing', plus thousands born with mutations, rare and ghastly.

Len Sturdy

That's a nasty preamble resulting from my musing about the fate of our late shipmate Len Sturdy; I was very close to him. He told me of his time on H.M.S. Plym. In Chatham dockyard she was readied for a trip to Christmas Island – to be vaporised.

Despite the planned fate cash was lavished upon her. Len told of the Captain's quarters being gutted then re-panelled, bunk, desk, incidental furniture, all brand new and of excellent bespoke workmanship. What displeased the Captain I did not learn, but evidently half was ripped out and redone, hang the cost.

I did not think, at the time, to question Len closely about events at the Island, how close were the crew on 'blast' day, how long they were on the Island after, which ship brought them home. Later in life Len had chronic gastric problems, was fitted with a 'bag' - later, when his plumbing was re-worked the bag was removed. His final year and a half, at least, was spent being connected to sustenance each evening by a visiting nurse, then, in the morning, being disconnected; thus a degree of mobility could be enjoyed. Eventually, fed up to the teeth with that state of affairs, I understand he asked his son Colin to remove the pipe work, cannulas etc. to allow him some peace; he died shortly afterwards. Colin, a worthy son, must have been in turmoil. Last time I met Colin his likeness to 'early' Len was amazing.

Amongst my stuff is a cowrie shell, a small white gastropod; in days gone by they served as currency in many islands in southeast Asia. It was given to me by Len who picked up several on Christmas Island. I come across it on occasions when looking for something else; it triggers fond memories of a 'fine shipmate'.

The military review is on us once more; same review but lots more hot air expended. Precursor is a plethora of pictures with all manner of sci-fi equipment depicted. M.O.D. Westminster must have a vigorous Star Wars club to pick from as an original thought had eluded them since Churchill suggested tanks were a good idea in 1916-ish. A decent one of those never left an M.O.D. drawing board; then *Centurion* came along, a private venture decades after W.W. 2. It sold abroad like hot cakes, not least because it had a decent gun. That gun was still fitted to *Centurion's* successor *Conqueror*, until the current review suggests it be fitted with the German Army's current smooth bore gun. I cannot recall the numbers mentioned, but certainly fewer than 50, fifteen minutes attrition when the balloon goes up. The number makes sense when the

suggested 10,000 brown jobs are made redundant – again – insufficient cannon fodder will be available to crew them.

M.O.D. laments a black hole (is that racist?) exists in their plans to the tune of several billion sterling. 'Tis possible we will resort to current popular method as used in 2020 to fund the N. H. S. bottomless pit.

Ask the Daily Mail to run another 'charitable donations campaign', it certainly brought in a shed load of millions in double quick time for the N. H. S. Then as an ace up the sleeve, every soldier put on the dole must be matched by a member of the Ministry of Defence civil service.

FOCUS, a much used word in their vocabulary, would possibly become pin sharp in the blink of an eye.

I felt refreshed on reading the debate in the House of Lords last month. Admiral West of Spithead, first Sea Lord 2002/6 during the 'I want ' session actually called the R.A.F.'s vigorous pursuit of a new manned air superiority aircraft as pie in the sky; if history has a lesson for us one has to agree.

Nuff eh?

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MY PART IN THE DOWNFALL OF A DICTATOR Part 2

By Ex Leading Seaman C Robinson

This story, written in 2005, was submitted to the People's War site.

On our return to Alex, Rommel had started his push eventually being halted at El Alamein. The decision was made to evacuate and transfer everything to Haifa in what was then Palestine. While leaving, a tug alongside us hit a mine and we were showered with bits and pieces. Later the Depot ship was torpedoed and sunk by an Italian submarine and some sailors and wrens were killed in the water when depth charges were dropped. While at Haifa we did not do a lot of sea time. Then it happened, with Rommel still at Alamein, Tobruk had fallen and German eyes were on Alex and Cairo.

In the summer of 1942, another convoy of 4 fast merchant ships set of for Malta with 2 light cruisers and about 12 destroyers as escorts. During this operation we met the Italian fleet in the Gulf of Sirte. It consisted of 1 battleship, 2 heavy cruisers and 2 flotillas of destroyers. This had happened once before but then they ran away. The second time, now known as the Second Battle of Sirte, they stayed to fight, all the time trying to get between the convoy and Malta, but although we were heavily outgunned, we out manoeuvred them by using smoke screens and torpedoes. We were the leading ship while making smoke, so all the time, our bows were visible to the enemy and although there were no hits, salvos of 15 and Sins shells fell all around us. Those that fell ahead of us created huge holes in the sea which we seemed to fall in to.

During the action, which lasted all day, the bombers were always there and we did have casualties. The weather got worse and worse and at the end of the day, when it began to get dark and the winds increased to gale force, the Italians called off the action, they were not trained to fight in bad weather or at night. We did damage one of the cruisers and they hit two of the destroyers. Of the 4 merchant ships, one was sunk at sea and one was badly damaged and had to be beached. The other two got in to Valetta but were sunk at their mooring, all by the bombers. Our damage consisted of a few holes in the superstructure, but the force of the weather and 15ins shells had forced the messdeck stanchions in through the deckhead. On return to Alex we were undergoing repairs, a boiler clean and ammunitioning during which we had an emergency call and had to get to sea as quickly as possible. Four destroyers, Kipling, Lively, Jackal and Jervis had gone to intercept a convoy off the Libyan coast where they were attacked by 31 bombers, high level and Stukas. Three were sunk, only Jervis survived and we had to go and escort her and 63 survivors back to Alex, which we did with no further casualties.

Churchill decided that some good news was required for a change so he ordered an attempt to recapture Tobruk, using the destroyers Sikh and Zulu to carry and land 500 Marine Commandos, escorted by the old cruiser H.M.S. Coventry and a few other destroyers, MTB's and ML's. A joint operation with the army's Long Range Desert Group, the RAF and us. We did the initial training in the whaler which was stupid, and we trained with .45 revolvers, they were later changed because they were dum dum, to 1st World War Italian revolvers which were hopeless. We were given plywood boats, one powered to act as a tug, towing 2 dumb craft, all 3 loaded to the brim with marines plus 2 sailors, bow and stern men. The boats were crap and the whole plan in our opinion was impassable, although at the time we didn't know where we were going, we found out later, an Arab on the oiler told us. It was a disaster, the army did a good job and got inside Tobruk but not many got back to Alex. We were guided in to the wrong place, on to rocks instead of a sandy beach.

I was in one of the boats that was ordered back to the ship. On arrival I went to my action station, 'Y' gun, which was unusable because of all the equipment stacked around it. I then followed some marines into the port passageway at the same time as a blast from exploding cordite came in at the other end, blowing the marines to the deck with me underneath them. They saved my life; they were all very badly burned while just my hands and neck were burnt. The skin on my hands was hanging of like a glove but I was still alive. Meanwhile a shell had hit us in the Gearing Room, causing the lubrication system to fail and the engines to seize up. We were sitting ducks. Zulu tried to tow us out of it but a shell hit the bollard to which the tow line was attached and that was the end.

Zulu was ordered to leave and we fought on until we were like a pepper pot from the continual pounding from the shore batteries and aircraft. Eventually the order was given to abandon ship and after 3 hours in the water, we were picked up, some by the Italians, some by the Germans. Those picked up by the Germans were well treated but we, who were picked up by the Italians, didn't even get a drink of water. Naturally we all became POW's. Those uninjured went to Benghazi and from there to Camp 70 near Ancona, Italy. I was kept in hospital at Tobruk and my hands treated with Gentian Violet.

During my time in hospital the 8th army began their advance from El Alamein so we were moved back, staying in various camps like Benghazi, Derna and Ohms. This continued until we arrived in Tripoli. From there we were shipped over to Naples and deposited in Camp 66, A Transit Camp at Capua, a few miles north of Naples. I had been in the desert camps from September to December.

Life as a POW wasn't a bed of roses, the main problem being food, the shortage of. Bread bun and a small piece of cheese for breakfast, thin vegetable stew for dinner and whatever we could scrounge for tea and supper. We did get Red Cross food parcels, 1 between 2; they were

good but didn't last very long. The second problem was those insect pests, crabs and lice, everyone had them. On a sunny afternoon we would sit in a row clearing the lice from the seams of our shirts. We didn't work because there was none to do. My day consisted of a brisk walk round the camp before breakfast, muster and head count by an Italian Sergeant Major who had lived in England for most of his life. Veg. stew at noon, delousing, another walk, a cup of ersatz coffee, made from acorns, then to bed and so on. I thought my war was over and life was going to be very boring until either we or Hitler won the war. Then the unheard of happened. The Italians had requested an exchange of some 700 plus sailors and I was one of the lucky ones. After weeks of rumours, we were mustered, about 20 of us, and marched all the way to Naples where we were put on to a cattle train and then to Bari on the other side of the country where once again, we met up with our other shipmates who were going home too.

We embarked on the hospital ship Gradisca and what we thought was a life of luxury began for us. Beds with clean white sheets and 2 white rolls per day and we didn't have to queue for them, they were brought to us. We weren't allowed out of bed. Then to Turkey where the exchange took place. We embarked on the S.S. Talma where we were supplied with food, warm clothing and other goodies, then set sail for Port Said where we were met by notaries and wrens with cups of tea and cakes. Then on to Alexandria and the camp, a Sidi Bishr where the process of rehabilitation commenced. First delousing and decrabbing which was heaven. We had the freedom of the camp and could go ashore at any time. Our target was always food and eventually, we began to look like spring onions. Our shore leave was limited and a sadist PTI was put in charge of us to get us fit before returning to the UK His favourite was to get us wheeling barrow loads of sand from here to there, then back from there to here. He did succeed and after 8 weeks of this, we travelled by train to Port Tewfic then on to the S.S. Isle de France starting a 26,000 mile journey home with no escort. We called at Durban, the Gold Coast and Rio de Janeiro before finally arriving at Granton on the Clyde. From there by train into Chatham dockyard to be met by those in charge, Jaunty's I think they were called. After a bit of ordering about they were politely told what to do and eventually I found myself in Duncan Block again, the start of another period of bringing a German Dictator to justice.

Prior to our Tobruk episode which was Sept 14th 1942, on Sept 9th on H.M.S. Cleopatra with a bit of help from a friendly signalman while doing Morse code, I passed for Leading Seaman. I didn't know whether or not I had passed until I got back to Chatham, but God bless them, their records were up to date and the back pay was there. I met up again with our old 30 Class instructor of 1939, now a Chief PO in the Barrack Guard, looking for wrong doers on the road between Duncan Block and the Main Gate. He did remember me because believe it or not, I was one of his few star pupils.

Again I got a job in the Barrack Guard, this time in charge of The Breakout Party which consisted of opening the lockers of ratings who didn't return from shore leave, collecting their

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gear and storing it. A cushy number but it passed the time on. I did this for 6 months, during which time I married Marjorie, as I promised, while a POW. This was during a weekend leave. Meanwhile I was drafted to a Fleet Minesweeper built at Blyth in Northumberland. A ship with a fancy name, H.M.S. Fancy. Again a trip by train up to Blyth and after many different kinds of trials we went to Tobermory to, amongst other things, learn how to sweep.

When proficient we travelled around a little and spent some time based at Harwich. Eventually we sailed into Portsmouth to prepare for D Day. We watched the build up and on 5th June, we sighed with relief, the operation was cancelled, but it was on again the next day. On 6th June we "led the way" to the French coast making it possible for the invasion. For us it was comparatively easy, but very tiring, always sweeping, always on the alert looking for aircraft, submarines and remote controlled motor boats loaded with explosives. At night we formed part of the perimeter guard. We did get back to Portsmouth occasionally but never stayed far long until Fred's department broke down. Eventually, when things were going well, we were transferred to the Med. On our way to Gibraltar we escorted a floating dock but this later had to be sunk in the Bay of Biscay because of storm damage plus a few bumps.

We arrived at Malta and joined the 19th MSF doing sweeps around the island. Then to Italy, based at Ancona, sweeping channels to Trieste and Venice. During this time the war with Germany ended, my part I think, being well played towards the downfall of a Dictator.

On Fancy, I did various jobs, starting off as a postman, then Cox' n of the motorboat, Cox'n of the sea boats crew, Chief Quartermaster and finally i/c sweeping party. I left the ship in December 1945, spent 2 weeks in St Angelo then home to the UK. I was a short service rating 7 years on and 5 years reserve and on February 15th 1946 I completed my time. On 16th I travelled back to Doncaster to my wife and family who I had not seen since December 31st 1944.

My reward for all this was 6 medals, 4 Campaign medals plus Rosette on Atlantic Star, a minesweeping and war medal and a mention in Despatches for my services to minesweeping. Also I have the Malta medal, a Normandy medal, a Veteran's medal supplied by Harry and also his wooden medal for being a humorist, which I value very much indeed.

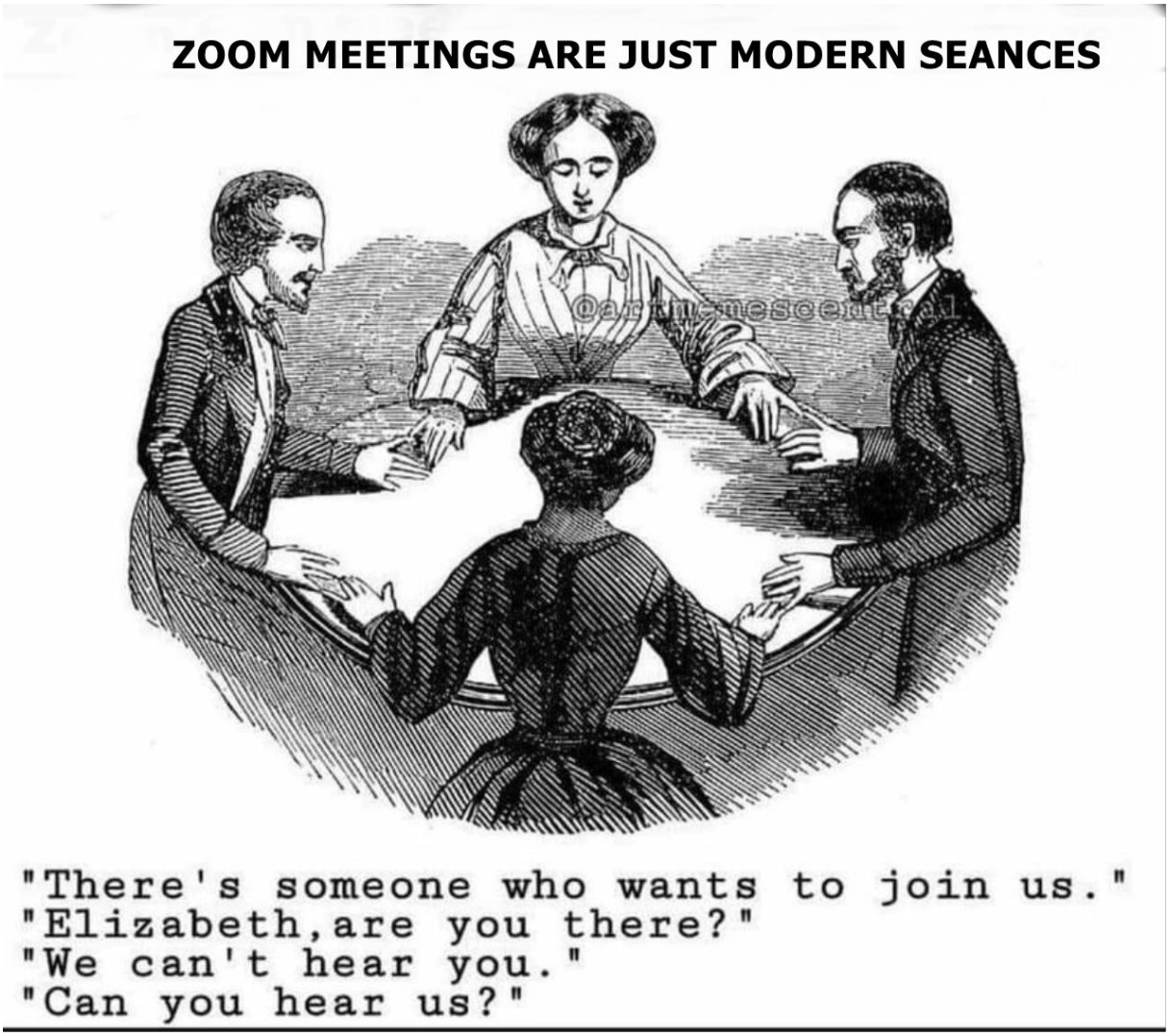
I enjoyed my time on Fancy more than on the destroyers, probably because there wasn't time on them for enjoyment. The main thing being that I survived and the Dictator didn't.

Note:- The submarines that sunk the Ark Royal and the depot ship were both sunk later, one by one of our trawlers, the other by Hunt Class destroyers off Haifa. Revenge was ours.

Apologies for any errors like timing, sequences and spelling but after 58 years, my memory sometimes plays tricks on me, but I guarantee that everything I have written did happen.

Marjorie and I have been together 60 years this year, we are not quite as agile as we used to be but we have 3 sons and daughters in law who make a good job of looking after us.

Yours Aye



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ARE YOU THE WEAKEST LINK?

Are you the weakest link? Below are four (4) questions.. You have to answer them instantly. You can't take your time, answer all of them immediately.

OK? Let's find out just how clever you really are. Ready?

YOU ARE PARTICIPATING IN A RACE.

First Question: You overtake the second person. What position are you in?

Second Question: If you overtake the last person, then you are in what position?

Third Question: Very tricky maths! Note: THIS MUST BE DONE IN YOUR HEAD ONLY. DO NOT USE PAPER AND PENCIL OR A CALCULATOR. JUST TRY IT.

Take 1000 and add 40 to it. Now add another 1000. Now add 30. Add another 1000. Now add 20. Now add another 1000. Now add 10. What is the total?

Fourth Question: Mary's father has five daughters: 1. Nana, 2. Nene, 3. Nini, 4. Nono. What is the name of the fifth daughter?

Answers Below

ANSWERS TO QUIZ

Answer 1: If you answered that you are first, then you are absolutely wrong! If you overtake the second person and you take his place, you are second!

Answer 2: If you answered that you are second to last, then you are wrong
You cannot overtake the LAST person!

Answer 3: Did you get 5000? The correct answer is actually 4100. Don't believe it? Check with your calculator!

Answer 4: Nunu? NO! Of course not. Her name is Mary.

NOZZERS GO WEST Part 23

By Ray Lambert

Euphoria from a very good run ashore coupled with more than a touch of liquid bravado gave Ginger the courage to stand his ground. Although not over tall himself, he towered above the horrible squirt of a man. The thin ringer was Bachelor from Ganges all over again. He was bright red in the face and shouting at the top of his voice, spitting as he did so. Most of what he said went unheard. Ginger wasn't interested in anything he had to say. The same thoughts kept going round in his head: I'm not at Ganges any more. I don't have to listen to this rubbish any longer.

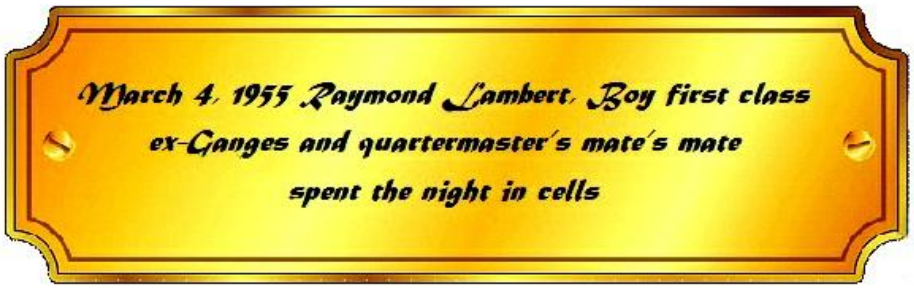
He stepped right up close and every time the thin ringer stepped back, he stepped up again, angling his head down far more than necessary, to emphasise the nasty little man's shortness.

Quite what he thought that would get him he hadn't thought but what it did he hadn't expected. Suddenly he was aware that a couple of Royal Marines were hovering close by and, completely ignoring the thin ringer, he turned round to see why they were there. His action caused the officer to notice them as well.

'Take him away!' he snarled.

Ginger still hadn't put two and two together. However the truth came to him with a bang when he was unceremoniously shoved into a cell with a block of wood for a bed.

Yes, Montevideo was an historic seaport and had a claim to its share of maritime history. It now had another chapter to add to its battle honours:



Next morning Ginger was treated to breakfast in bed. It was delivered to his suite and scoffed in record time. He'd had nothing to eat since dinnertime the previous day and the fighting bears were having a growling competition in his stomach. He hadn't planned on being given anything to eat but when it turned up it was accepted with gratitude. That breakfast seemed better than usual, possibly because he was famished but whatever it was or however it tasted, it would have received the same treatment.

There was a cell sentry outside the door and he reluctantly escorted Ginger down to his mess to collect his washing kit and then on to the bathroom. Why it was deemed necessary to escort

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him everywhere was never explained although common sense should have told them there was nowhere for him to go. He was hardly likely to run away.

Running away wouldn't have been an option, even if it had been on his mind, because it was not long before he was summoned out of his cell and, still in his white top and shorts from the previous day and having slept in them, he was escorted down to the quarterdeck and the Commander's defaulters table.

En route he stopped off at a water fountain that was in the flat directly at the top of the boys messdeck hatch for a drink of cold water and that proved to be his undoing. That water relivened the booze from the day before and transported him back to the state that had got him into trouble in the first place.

As he emerged into the sunlight he was surprised to see that they had left the jetty and were already under way and heading for their next destination. The defaulters were lined up on the port side of the quarterdeck and there seemed to be quite a lot of them. Ginger found it amusing and couldn't suppress a fit of giggles.

'A bit like divisions, with this lot here ain't it mate?' he said to the man next to him on the end of the line. The man stood stiff and stony faced. Still seeing the funny side of things, he attempted to get a conversation going with the next person in line, completely unaware that the Commander and the assembled officers were standing, waiting and watching his every move.

Somehow Ginger managed to stumble his way to the head of the line of waiting miscreants and was dealt with first when the Master-at-Arms managed to restore order. Suddenly it dawned on him that there he was, in front of the Commander, various officers and the Master-as-Arms, alone and vulnerable. He had brought things upon himself. It was no one's fault except his own. His antics due to the top-up of the booze impressed no one, least of all the Commander. There was no point in denying anything; the evidence was there plain as day and for all to see. Never was the old saying: 'when you see a hole, stop digging' been more apt.

If he hadn't missed the gate; if he hadn't shown off in front of that thin ringer; if he hadn't had that drink of water; if he hadn't have got the giggles …. but that was all too late now. The Commander made it crystal clear that he didn't think much of drunks, particularly underage boy seaman drunks.

Their next port of call was Santos and it would take four days to get there and it would be ten days before they arrived at their next destination after that. Ginger wasn't particularly interested; as he left the Commander's table he knew it would be ten days before he would be setting foot ashore again – anywhere.

It was Saturday. It had to be Saturday or at least the weekend, because they were at sea. It appeared they were always at sea on weekends. It was another of the quirks of the Captain, Commodore 'Fearless Freddie'. He seemed to have some fixation about being at sea on weekends in addition to his obsession of finding storms to sail into at every opportunity. However, 'at sea' may not have been quite accurate because, this time they were heading up a river to the Brazilian port of Santos.

Not many people on board had ever heard of Santos despite it being advertised as one of the busiest ports in the world. The entrance to it certainly was busy and by far the busiest and most congested they had seen so far as they steamed further up river. It was certainly the most ships Ginger had ever seen in one place; ships of all nationalities and including some of the Brazilian Navy. Superb managed to snuggle in among them and ease herself alongside at 0930 on Tuesday.

The next morning fresh provisions and stores came aboard followed by the inevitable visitors during the afternoon. This time he was not able to dodge the spectacle of 1600 pairs of trampling feet, nor was he able to dodge the scrubbing down of the quarterdeck prior to 6 o'clock the following morning. He was 'under punishment' and was told in no uncertain terms that he would be required for scrubbing every morning at 0550 with whatever watch may be on early duty, before taking up his duties on the gangway as his watches decreed, from 0800 onward. He managed to steer clear of the children's party the next afternoon by being on the afternoon watch on the gangway but was not able to escape the shepherding of visitors around the day after, in what should have been his spare time. Again, he was told, this time by the duty petty officer: 'gangway staff or no gangway staff, there's no such thing as time off for men under punishment!'

Santos turned out to be a good run ashore, or at least once clear of the harbour area it was. That's what Ginger was told by those who had ventured into town. He hadn't set foot ashore and was not about to do so in that small corner of the world.

Santos appeared to be the centre of the butterfly industry and the butterfly wings were used to decorate souvenir trays and pictures. These trays found their way back onboard by the dozens. It was rumoured that more than two hundred came up the gangway on one night alone. Ginger managed to persuade someone to bring him one back and that was stowed away safely and earmarked for his elder sister, who had got married since he had left England.

Not being allowed ashore, due to his alcoholic misdemeanour a few days earlier and what now seemed ages ago, he had time to put his souvenirs and trinkets in order.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT MONTH

JUST MULLING OVER

By Sharky Ward

I have a drawer full of *SUPERB* stuff and usually find what I'm looking for but I seem to have drawn a blank when looking for information as to what happened in the Med collecting the drowned bodies of some Spanish sailors.

I remembered us hauling them aboard treating the rigor that had set in and respectfully covering them with the Spanish flag. When the bodies were handed over, the sullen crew that came to collect them flung them into their boat like sides of beef muttering obscenities about the English (that's what I remembered) perhaps the years have muddled my thought process and I've got it wrong.

I think I remembered shipmate Brian Hill (Baz) looking a bit apprehensive cause it was said that the youngest were always the ones picked to actually put a line round the corpse for hauling it up ?

Also the Petty Officer in charge of the boy's mess was a peer of the realm by the name of Der Lacher, that doesn't sound right but it's as near I can get it. Probably as the years go by the things that you have seen get tinged with a little bit of bullshit and you only like the thing you only want to remember some call it Selected Memory.

Did we leave Gibraltar harbour with every other ship for some reason like weather conditions?

Was this the time when the Med. fleet played the Home fleet? , and <u>am I</u> the only one suffering from memory loss?

(P. s I'm not going crackers after all. Shipmate Brian Hill " Baz " has been in touch and confirmed what I thought with a few more add –ons).

All ships in Gibraltar harbour had to leave their berths due to the prevailing wind conditions with an imminent incoming storm about to arrive.

The storm blew itself out overnight and the next day we had to collect dead bodies of Spanish sailors , the story was that a Spanish frigate broke its back in the storm and a load of trainees had drowned " that's what I heard ".

Can you imagine what would dominate the Headlines in our newspapers today making a young lad strip down to his pants tying a rope round him and making him go over the side swim out and tie a line round a corpse for it to be hauled up ?

Poor old " Baz " got down as far as his knickers with his right leg over the guardrail when the arrival of a Spanish ship saved his bacon and he didn't need to get wet after all, he later probably had to change his pants anyway !

I know that our boys mess had a peer of the realm; it seems that he had joined-up as an A/B and was working his way up!

One day us boys were in the whaler being lowered away when the red face of "Fred of the Caribbean " appeared over the side and called out "Come on Der-lacker, pull your finger out man". Then, looking behind him for the expected chuckle from his following retinue of ass lickers and Midshipmen. Der-Lacker dutifully saluted and replied, 'Lord Der-lacker if you please sir'. That reply was as good as a severe kick in the butt to Fred, the silence that followed said it all.

These were the days when if you were related to someone who had the slightest connection to anyone royal and possessed a hyphenated name you were half way up the promotion ladder, we certainly didn't call them pigs for nothing.

Our Cruise in 54/55 crippled a lot of the officers financially because it consisted of continuous Cocktail parties one after another. Their mess bills must have looked like a small country's GDP.

If one of our lot got a draft chit for the West Indies we would be chuffed whereas an officer would have to make an appointment with his bank manager.

It's great that we have in our midst people trying to keep our association going, I wonder how many more like ours will have disappeared when, or if this Covid lark has gone.

All the best - John (Sharky)

SINKING OF HMS PENELOPE

by Gordon Skea

Perhaps the thoughts that St Valentine's Day brings are somewhat different in everyone's mind. It is the chance to get even with somebody to bring them down to earth, as it were. Or on the other hand an opportunity to declare a love that has lain dormant for a long time. A card or gift sent to a loved one, anonymously of course, usually has the recipient in a state of excitement or in a quandary, or both:

My thoughts on St. Valentine's Day are perhaps unusual and for me it is difficult to bring to mind anything but thoughts of the eighteenth of February and not the fourteenth, thoughts of a boyish face that had yet to grow the full bristles of manhood.

You, the reader of this narrative, will no doubt form your own conclusions as to whether my own very personal St. Valentine's Day should fall on the eighteenth and I leave it to you.

The ship, a six thousand ton, six inch gun cruiser lay alongside the quay in Naples Harbour. The ammunitioning, oiling and provisioning completed, it was now ready to sail to the Anzio Beachhead where it had been before the all too brief spell, without shore leave, in Naples. I say "spell", but anything that granted us a relief in harbour away from the monotonous bombardment of unseen targets, and being bombed ourselves, was a bonus. To be able to sling our hammocks for a change and to have a good night's sleep was indeed a luxury.

We had left harbour and were steaming towards our allotted position, when the first two torpedoes struck us port side aft. Luckily my mates and I were "watch below" at the time.

After the "tin fish" had struck our action station, the after director, or master sight, was blown from its mounting about fifteen feet above the upper-deck. …. If we had been on it?

Being a leading seaman I formed a party to shift top-weight, the ship having taken a heavy list to port, to get her on an even keel once again. Having moved, or ditched the heavier stuff from the portside over to starboard, I began to get the ship ready for the tow back to Naples.

It is the practice when paying-out a large crippled wire to stand on the coil and release one turn at a time in order not to end up with - the saying is international among the sea-going fraternity '~a bunch of bastards'. The coil was stowed just forward of the after funnel, and the task of standing on the wire, a menial one which a most junior seaman can do with ease, was given to my relief, a young ordinary seaman, whilst I moved a few feet to the ship's side, to see if the working-party were coiling the wire correctly. They were in fact in the act of passing the wire over the side.

Perhaps my instructions had not been clear, however! It was an easy task to haul it back and to coil it down again ready for use. This was being carried out, when another two torpedoes struck the other side of the ship in almost the same place as before and opposite to where I was standing. Fortunately I was standing close to the ship's side whilst directing the party coiling down the wire, and I found myself being blown or thrown into the sea, and then swimming upwards to the surface. I must have gone down some distance for when I broke surface again the ship was in two pieces, the stern showing her rudders and screws and the red-leaded bottom of the main part of the ship rising to an almost vertical angle before taking her final plunge.

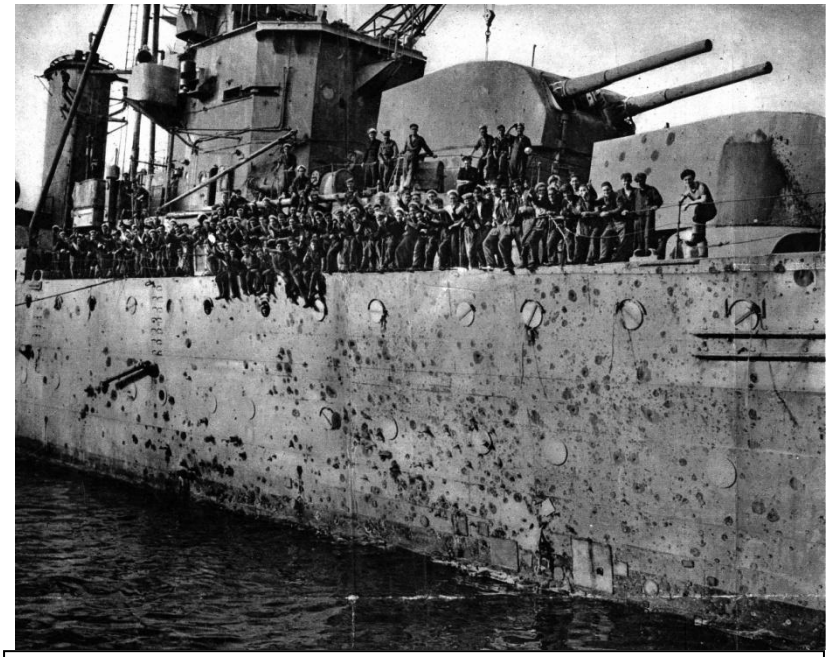
Striking out to try and put as much distance between me and the ship in case of further explosions from depth-charges etc. and getting a fair distance away I treaded water and watched as she disappeared. Seeing a Carley-Float come to the surface and having no life belt I struck out for it forgetting in my haste about the dreaded oil-fuel till it was too late…. It stank and stung the eyes, clogged the nostrils and if one swallowed it, it was almost certain death, for many men died that day from oil-fuel poisoning.

The stark reality was forced upon me a few years later whilst watching the television news of the seabirds covered in oil in the Gulf war and how we must have looked that fatal day.

The U-boat commander certainly knew his business and carried out his attack in almost copy-book style, for the ship having lost-way and had almost completed a full circle he fired his second two torpedoes which tore the ship in half.

The young ordinary-seaman I never saw again, with the ship breaking in two almost at the point where he was standing, I only hope his end was swift.

It was February the 18th 1944…The ship was ***HMS Penelope*** also known as the' Pepper Pot ' from her previous commission.



Starboard side after heavy bombing in the Mediterranean. There are hundreds of holes sustained from heavy bombing whilst in Malta Harbour. The holes have been plugged with shafts of wood prior to going to Gibraltar

Out of a complement of 618 officers and men only 203 survived, she sank in one minute twenty-five seconds after the second two torpedoes hit, the ***U-boat 410*** had done her work, her commander was Otto Fenski aged 25 years.

The name of that young ordinary—seaman was Valentine - St. Valentine the second.... I often wonder!

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BACK IN 1956 Part 16

By Lt. Cdr. E. H. Chittleburgh

THE COMMUNICATION DIVISION

"Of what avail the loaded tube,

The turret or the shell

If flags and W/T default

The Fleet will go to hell".

During the commission this small but active Division has been going about its many and varied tacks with what we hope our observers have considered is quiet efficiency. As Communicators we do appreciate only too well the inter-dependence of one department in the ship on another. We proudly boast that nothing happens in a fighting ship for a fighting service, that had not got a communicator somewhere in the background, be it firing guns, fuelling, storing, sporting activities, welfare or weather forecast. Like all other departments our activities are many and varied, but we know only too well that behind everything we do, our friends and contemporises, be they Seaman, Plumber, Shipwright, Purser or Royal Marines are doing their bit (either directly or indirectly) to keep the Communications wheels turning. And so to our accounting.

Blessed as we were to be the first ship to undertake a commission with the new Interim Peace Complement (reduced) of 2 Chief Petty Officers, 5 Petty Officers and 27 other ratings, with none of the modern contraptions such as RATT to lighten our labours, we approached our task with some trepidation, which increased on our arrival at Trinco were we found that the staff contribution for C-in-C embarked had, likewise, suffered reduction. Our initial problem was increased by the large percentage of the staff for whom this ship was a first something, i.e. first ship, first ship in two years, first ship as a killick.

There were also many technical problems to be solved, notably acute local interference on all H.F frequencies, including our Broadcast, and the mountain of cleaning and restoration work to be progressed. Thus we left Chatham on March 4th 1956 and indeed we found the going hard at first, and for many weeks both our watches and our mistakes were undoubtedly many, and we found little opportunity for sport and other outside activities. At times the burden of our misfortune seemed set to overwhelm us. Corrupt messages on the Broadcast, corrupt messages by V.S. typing errors, and the Flag Deck gravity tank overflowing over our new paint with monotonous regularity. We struggled on manfully, learning by our mistakes, slowly improving,

made ourselves an Egyptian ensign in a hurry to pass through the Canal to Aden. We were beginning to find our feet, despite the loss of work-up period. Then struck tragedy! The crane carried away all our main roof aerials in the dark. This meant all Tells. Off watch all day struggling to re-make and re-hoist complete aerial rig steaming at high speed. The Telegraph side of the department, with something solid achieved at last, was on its way to cohesion and efficiency. The V.S. Department, its tragedy delayed until our second hasty visit to Bahrein, was also slowly making progress. Of our maintainer problems, all of which had some bearing on our (and their) efficiency, were also finding solution. The gravity tank was cured, some of the air conditioners began to work, the interference lessened, and morale was on the ascendant as confidence was gained.

By the time *Superb* arrived in Trinco for her first lengthy visit, the whole department was operating sufficiently well for all of us to look forward to the East African Cruise with C-in-C and Staff embarked, and the attendant communication problems with relish. We were asked to prove ourselves, although our reaction to being in company with a Force of other war ships, and rather different problems of manoeuvring, flag-hoisting and rapid signalling was still an unknown quantity. In taking stock we found also some relief, and were able to enter sporting and other activities. We found that we had a pretty strong Inter-part hockey team with the Navigator Y. S. Jarrold, P. O. Tel. Taylor and Sigs. Allaway, Reynolds and Hadley the strong performers. A reasonable soccer team with Tel. Sayce (goal), P. O. Tel. Taylor and Sig. Reynolds and Allaway among the stars. Sayce was to go on and become the ship's regular goal-keeper, with Reynolds, until beset by injury, a regular second eleven player, contending strongly for a first team place on the wing, and Tel. Clements operating in the half back line. Sig. Hadley also emerged as a most competent dinghy coxswain, whilst L. Tel. Baldry and Tels. Nicholson and Sayce had become firmly ensconced in the Concert Party. And so Mombasa And East African ports beyond and, of course, Seychelles. Because of C-in-C's Communication load, we weren't able to take as much leave as most of our shipmates, but when we did get ashore we enjoyed ourselves and righteously admired the smart performance of l. Sig. Knight at the Beating Retreat ceremonies.

Back to Trinco to prepare for the J.E.T. Exercises 1956, pausing only to combine with Central Division in the Inter-Part Sports which we jointly wrestled from the Royal Marines at the last event, the high Jump. Never shall we forget that last, which we entered needing the points for 3rd and 5th to pip the Royals, who had no finalist qualified, nor our relief and joy when our representatives Tel. Sayce and Lieut. (O/E) Payne emerged with a hard won 2nd and 3rd, those glorious relay teams which really clinched our victory and the gallantry of Shipwright Phillips, who deliberately threw away his certain individual win in the mile in order to ensure our relay victory with a fast ½ mile. Thence to J.E.T. 56. Five weeks and five days of hell on earth, when we proved our solidarity and team spirit. We slaved away on two watches day and night, culminating in virtually one, whilst we wrested from our foes the information which bad circuit

discipline and careless talk revealed to our questing ears to the delight of our lone raider Captain. And the Indian and Pakistan ships and aircraft left, leaving us in sole possession once again of Trinco harbour, but not before those of us off watch had joined the Communicators of Crane, *Modeste* and *Comus* in "Comjetpic" on Nilavelli beach, from which we returned to the strain of "the Oggie Song". Over the rest of the commission we mercifully draw a veil. Shipmates, we know you suffered, and you have our sympathy, but please believe us when we tell you that none suffered more than we. Mombasa and Simonstown (particularly the latter), having restored our spirits, we look happily ahead to Chatham leave and our Cruise with F. O. F. H.

Andy Brierley asks "Who saw her sitting on the bullring at the start of morning watch"

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Brian,
I totally agree to the fact that you have been made chairman of the association.
Robin gave me a call just before Christmas, and he said he was having a struggle. He asked me if I could do another painting of the Super B.
Superb spent some time in the Med early on in her life. So I thought I could paint her passing The Rock of Gibraltar. Just hope we can all meet up again in October.
It's good to see Denise has taken over as treasurer. Robin's lucky that he has two daughters who are loyal to the association. Keep up the good work, and Many Thanks,
When do we pay our subs? **Brian Turner**
[ED: This year's subs should have been paid by the end of February. There has been some delay due to the postal service but yours have now arrived, thanks Brian!]

Brian,
Re your covering letter for this month's magazine about George Scurfield. I remember George very well. After leaving the Superb I met up with him again in HMS Sultan and later we both served on HMS Broadsword as POMEs. I have looked at the photograph and do not think George is in it? I shall look through my own photographs to see if I can find one of him taken when we were on the Broadsword.
The last address I had for him was on the Isle of Sheppey. I wrote some time ago to him to try and encourage him to join our association. Regrettably did not receive a reply. Should think he has moved on as my last visit to him was in 1960. **Bill Cook**
[ED: Bill, thanks for looking we are now uncertain if George was aboard and have ascertained that he crossed the bar back in the early 1990s]

Hi Brian,
Received your letter yesterday very pleased to hear that you are taking over as chairman I think the obvious choice. I know Robin has not been well for some time and wish him well we have a chat from time to time.
Pleased to hear that Denise is keeping her hand in and being treasurer, all the family do us proud.
As regards the photo of the Stokers' messes here are some names Paul Christian, Dodger Long, Jock Durie, Whacker Payne, Pete Francis, Jim Senior and Buster Brown .George Scurfield is not on it because he must have picked his rate up as a POME he would be in the POs mess.
Well Mr Chairman, Good luck and give my regards to Libby I wish you both well look forward to October. Yours aye, **Joe Heaton**

PHOTO ALBUM

HMS Dorsetshire
picking up Bismarck survivors
on May 27, 1941

The photo below, a copy of which was posted last month, shows some names recently supplied by Shipmate Joe Heaton and with the help of Shipmate Bill Cook both of were able to help with my appeal for names

UPDATE

HMS Superb
Stokers Mess Christmas Day, 1956

1 Paul Christian 2 Dodger Long 6 Jock Durie 7 Whacker Payne
8 Pete Francis 10 Jim Senior 11 Len Baker 12 Buster Brown

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CROSSED THE BAR

Further details of ex shipmates (but not necessarily members of the Association) who have crossed the bar can be found on the appropriate page our website.

To go there please click **HERE**

Crossed the Bar (Recently Notified)

Nothing recently notified

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ARCHIVED CONTENT

Links to past copies of the Magazine can be obtained from Brian by sending an email message

CLICK HERE
to send message

THE END