H.M.S. SUPERB (CRUISER) ASSOCIATION

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CHAIRMAN OF THE ASSOCIATION, BRIAN SAUNDERS

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Superb - Defending Britain Since 1710

ANDY BRIERLEY'S BLOG

Dear Shipmates,

The pace at which the year is already galloping on surprises me; the terminal part of 2021 was rather a bumpy ride that meant I failed to feel the jolt as mankind lurched into 2022. I am not moaning my lot as ever I subscribe to the notion that 'life springs eternal'. One of the girls read my horoscope which advised 'now is the time to get out more and socialise, attend parties' etc. From reports on the wireless I will certainly have to get out more, to a doorway in the shopping precinct with a begging bowl to meet the newly inflated cost of heating the homestead.

It brings forth the milk of human kindness from passersby with remarks like; 'Get a job you lazy bugger'. Such heartfelt comments from the lower class were absent from Bishop Welby's Christmas message, exhorting us to kindness and generosity to illegal channel crossers. Meanwhile his Lambeth Palace residence echoes empty whenever a servant coughs. He knows their wallets are thin after paying truck drivers three K for a ride over or purchase of a rubber dingy.

Dedicated
To
WILLIAM GASTON WALKLEY

And very often have we heard
How men are killed and undone
By accidents in carriages,
By thieves, or fires in London;
We know what risks all landsmen run,
From noblemen to tailors:
Then, Bill, let us thank Providence
That you and I are sailors.

By Charles Dibdin

I got a couple of interesting books from little brother, published in 1961, which was meant to be a trilogy, but he failed to get the first which was entitled *Sail Ho*. They are the sea faring life of Sir James Bisset. That first was his life in sailing ships 1898/1904; the second volume titled *Tramps and Ladies*, his early years in steam 1905-1912. 3rd title *War, Peace and Big Ships*. He was Commodore of the Cunard Line at the end of his career, having captained the *Queen Mary* and the *Queen Elizabeth* as troop ships and luxury liners; a truly wonderful life story. The last volume has a dedication to a fellow officer William Walkley who had been his friend over all those years that plucked my G-string.

During Captain Bisset's climb up Cunard's promotional ladder he had been master of the four-funnelled *Mauritania*, holder of the Atlantic Blue Ribbon, for many years. It had two guises, one as a coal burner then converted to oil burning in 1921.

I had written a previous newsletter of the nuke sub sent at short notice to the Falklands (28 knots at 500 feet for 8000 miles); only the crew's need to eat and sleep would prevent her doing that a dozen time over, with no shortage of breath; the contrast with *Mauretania* who burnt 1000 tons of coal per day when crossing the Atlantic in her 192 fires that heated 25 boilers. The 'Black Gang' of 324 firemen and trimmers being very much the losers when oil became the economic saviour of many shipping lines; all just paid off into a depressed labour market. Allied to that was the 'Dust Lung Disease' that was such an affliction to coal shifters of the time; short lives terminating in much pain, really on the horns of a dilemma of 'Job for Life'.

France and Germany also had *Blue Ribbon* contenders on the lucrative luxury Atlantic run to the U.S.A. and back, so I feel conversion to oil must have saved many hundreds of lives from a miserable end.

Before we move on may I confuse the issue by harking back to nuke sub *Conqueror* once more. The Captain chose to use Mk 8 torpedoes on his target the *Belgrano* knowing them more reliable than his wire-guided alternative. His spread of Mk 8's had two certain hits, as logic would expect, the third went belong the *Belgrano* and hit one of the destroyer escorts, did not explode but left a substantial dent in her plates. Mark 8's are driven by a radial engine on rape seed oil. Developed in WW 1 there was real value for money.

I was amazed by a story of a lad who told his 'Mam' he had asked God for a bike for Christmas. She told him at length, God does not work that way ---------- so he stole a bike and asked God for forgiveness.

A look at the New Year's Honours list in the *Times*; six close typed pages with hardly any borders does make one wonder about this antiquated charade. More than ever I am anti this public waste of time and money on the 'back scratching game' played out before our very eyes. One tabloid today, Monday, claims a petition has soared above 400,000 names demanding Tony Blair's knighthood be rescinded as he is a war criminal who cost U.K. families in excess of 700 sons and daughters; none of Tony's of course, his son of prime military age was becoming a rapid multi millionaire on the back of despots 'Tone' knows.

Daughter shoe-horned into mother's law firm that specialises in 'human rights', none of which are 'Tone's' clients. Puts one in mind of Nero in ancient times; i.e. Westminster fiddles (literally) as Britain burns. Such a blanket of unkindness does not fit all honour's recipients I will hasten to make clear, the number of remarkable females is no surprise. The lady who nailed Covid 19 vaccination in an astonishingly quick time, and her team, are beyond praise; a large dung heap of Blairs not being worthy of a place in the same field. A smart stroke was pulled by ex P.M. May who made her husband a knight, it carried the automatic title of Lady for his wife.

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The depths to which politicians will go to denigrate each other seemed quite bottomless when reading, last week, of attacks on Mrs. Macron, the French president's wife, accusing her of being a 'transman' (whatever that is) and demanding proof of otherwise. It is near certain, following a long marriage, such information would be common knowledge years ago. Had the 'first lady' lived in the U.K. seduction of one of her 15 year old school boys would have seen her in the courts for sure; that's the law, but it still takes two to tango.

There sat I feeling fireproof, jabs x 3 plus flu, what could possibly go amiss? Answer, mixing with the kids! My every day asbestosis was the wrongest possible companion when I tested Covid positive. On a couple of occasions I struggled for breath – or fought for it. I see how the aged, with existing problems, so easily succumbed.

I had not been flippant about mask wearing, or distance keeping etc. and do not have any sympathy for anti-vaxers who rapidly expire. I don't think I got anywhere near *'The Bar'* section of Brian's news round-up, was smug enough to feel immune, then got a salutary kick up the fundamental. I have a budget date to live till 97 years old; should the aforementioned take place before that time my remains are left to the school at Guy's for educational dissection; that took a bit of persuasion I can tell you. The thought of being useful for a couple of years extra really appeals as a 'thanks for life that ever seemed to offer me something new and challenging'.

A PRAYER

Give me a good digestion, Lord,
And also something to digest;
But when and how that something comes
I leave to Thee, Who knowest best.

Give me a healthy body, Lord;
Give me the sense to keep it so;
Also a heart that is not bored
Whatever work I have to do.

Give me a healthy mind, Good Lord,
That finds the good that dodges sight;
And seeing sin, is not appalled,
But seeks a way to put it right.

Give me a point of view, Good Lord,
Let me know what is, and why.
Don't let me worry overmuch
About the thing that's known as 'I'.

Give me a sense of humour, Lord,
Give me the power to see a joke,
To get some happiness from life
And pass it on to other folk.

Another body tale is the change to my prostate medication; telling of its side effects the Doc said it blocks testosterone, the anti aging drug, and kills the libido. At my currant vintage I confess the question purely academic, the mad monkey of procreation got off my back some considerable time ago, I will become a eunuch (castrated man employable in a harem); wonder what the pay rate is, or the fringe benefits, may even have a pension.

All that seems dependant on the precarious talks U.S. President Biden is to have with Putin on the Kazakhstan and Ukraine threats.

A comment by one spiteful reporter said 'Things

may be looking up as Pres. Jo. had been observed in Washington walking and chewing gum at the same time'. Come what may he has my hopes for a successful conversation; communication is the vital ingredient in such tense times.

This effort has been a fits and starts affair and may well read like a dog's dinner.

Before I go I would like to wish a stalwart member of the Association a lovely spring outcome of her chemo. Janet Ward always swells numbers at reunion by bringing her sister and brother-in-law along; hope to see them all in May at King Charlie's place.

Cannot resist another wee verse (shown above) to end the 3rd of Captain Bisset's books. Rations, particularly on sailing ships, could be meagre and tough to stomach. It is by Thomas Webb, a young officer in the Welsh Guards, killed in action during the 1914-18 war.

It's fare thee all well - hope it pans out to your satisfaction in'22 and do not sweat the small stuff.

NOZZERS GO WEST Part 32

He recalled all that struggling and trying to do their best for the final passing out parade at Ganges – and for what? Once clear of the place such things didn't matter anymore and attaining a high standard made no more difference to their later career; the moment their feet left Ganges soil they were forgotten. That is, apart from the personal satisfaction gained from doing their best and making petty officer Cyril Jury, their Ganges instructor, a very happy man. That was one thing that Ginger felt he would always feel a certain amount of pride in and, although it was never put into words, he knew the others felt the same. In a way it was their way of thanking Jury for all his hard work and, although he had never said so in as many words, they knew it was the only reward he ever wanted.

They were top of the tree for a few days, back then and they wallowed in a certain amount of self-congratulation as they swaggered around but as they left the place for the last time, a door had closed on that chapter of their lives. From then on no one had been remotely interested in their achievements, good or not so good. They were boys and, as boys, they were underdogs, previous accolades counted for nothing they were simple boys again.

Ginger reflected glumly on where those two years had gone. It seemed a long time ago now but, when he stopped to think about it, some incidents remained sharp, as if they had happened only two weeks rather than two years ago.

Gloom and despondency was beginning to envelope him and he knew he had to shake the feeling off before it took too much of a hold. He told himself how lucky he was to be away from the biting wind of Shotley and out in the tropical splendour of Bermuda. He knew that people spent a lot of money to travel to Bermuda and he was there free of charge but, on the other hand those moneyed people didn't spend their days tied up against the wall of a derelict, decaying, falling to pieces, former dockyard.

Nevertheless, Bermuda was still Bermuda and most of the people back home would never have the opportunity of experiencing the island for themselves so, in that sense he was privileged. A dockyard was still a dockyard and Malabar was almost derelict but all the same, he was fortunate to be there and he knew it.

Bermuda wasn't the most friendly of places and although he had encountered nothing but politeness from the residents, which included a lot of Americans and British, there was slight feeling of aloofness about the place. A lot of the islanders must have relied on the Royal Navy

for their livelihood one way or another, perhaps not as much as during the war when the dockyard was in full swing but the navy still kept a lot of them in work. There was never any feeling of ill will from those who attended to the ships at ground level; the indigenous population were always friendly enough. The atmosphere, such as it was, came from those American and British who had moved in as managers and the like of the big companies. The ones that had acquired the unflattering title of *rich whites in their ivory towers*, and of course the millionaires, of whom there were quite a few.

Ginger had never ventured further than Hamilton and that was where the 'them and us' syndrome was most noticeable. Not in the bars where, naturally, they were geared to accept money from whoever was offering. But along the main road, Front Street, which ran parallel to the water's edge and in some ways, must have been their equivalent of Rodeo Drive or Regent Street.

That was where those *rich whites* parading in their Bermuda shorts and white socks pulled right up to the knees, accompanied by their *ladies* in flowery dresses and white gloves, would sweep past unsuspecting matelots, almost as if they were invisible or looking down their posh noses as if a nasty smell had suddenly appeared, simply for having the unmitigated audacity to think they could walk on *their* pavement or look into *their* shops.

That kind had their own drinking places in the golf clubs and hotels and where only a selected few were invited. The 'non-selected' didn't mind because that left the likes of the *Quarry Bar*

and the *Brass Rails* clear of such people. Just up the hill a short way and at right angles to Front Street was a snooker hall on the same side and just past the *Quarry Bar* and a little further up and to the right was another hangout for the boys. They had those two places pretty much to themselves as well. Ginger didn't think much of the *Brass Rails*, not that there was anything wrong with that bar but it tended to be where the chiefs and petty officers congregated. He liked the *Quarry Bar*. It was aptly named because it was simply a hole hewn out of the rock. It was down a set of stairs from the road and had a central circular bar area in the middle of the room. Rum and coke was the popular drink and the boys quickly cottoned-on to the fact that after the first drink, which was a generous measure anyway, the second and subsequent drinks contained three times as much rum.

Ginger found that he was not alone in not wanting to go into Hamilton very often. The snooker hall didn't hold much in the way of entertainment although there was a juke box that played Nat King Cole records and the boys made a lot of friends among the locals by just agreeing that he was a very good singer, every time yet another record started up. The other place just round the corner at the top of the hill was more of a *YMCA* type establishment. The atmosphere inside was always very friendly and a cup of tea and a sticky bun was usually available but they much preferred the delights of the *Quarry Bar*. But all in all and remembering they had to be back onboard reasonably sober by 1800, including the boat ride, Hamilton trips as far as the boys were concerned were not the best way to spend the afternoon.

However, thanks to Fearless Freddie's generosity, whilst in Bermuda, the boys were allowed leave until 2200 if they were at the *Under 19 Club*, just a way outside the dockyard gate and 2230 if they were at the picture show in the dockyard cinema. As there was very little, if any, check on people walking up and down the gangway in the dockyard, it meant that the boys could do their own thing within the extended hours without any problems of getting found out. As long as they were back from Hamilton by 1800 topped up with rum and coke, they could then go to the *Under 19 Club* for a few sedentary bottles of beer until 2200. That worked well and many of them didn't bother going to Hamilton at all. Everything they wanted was at the club, plus it didn't entail a boat trip to get there. They could always swing that extra half hour by saying they had been to the cinema, if challenged.

That extra leave time dredged Ginger out of the doldrums and, from not liking the place very much, he now wondered if nine weeks in the dockyard would be long enough.

One of the most memorable things that May brought with it was a thick fog, so dense that all boat traffic was halted at 2200 for safety reasons but before alternative arrangements could be implemented, it dissipated into the night sky and normal routine resumed again at midnight. Ginger was unaware of any such activity until he was told about it the following morning. He had

taken an early night and had slept though the whole event, or non-event, as the case may have been.

The following day, new midshipmen joined the ship then, on Friday, it was payday once more. So as not to disrupt the flow of obsessive scrubbing, painting and cleaning, that went on all day, every day, it was agreed that the pay muster would be held at 0730.

Then, on Sunday it was announced that divisions would be held on the jetty. There was no explanation as to why but naval officers of any rank; let alone those of commodore status, do not give explanations. Naturally, divisions were followed by a march past accompanied by the Royal Marine Band and as soon as that was accomplished a Sunday service was held on the quarterdeck. This time they had a captive audience because at the conclusion of the march past, the parade was marched up the after gangway and straight onto the quarterdeck. That meant there were so many people and nowhere near enough seats resulting in as many having to stand at the back as there were sitting down: Freddie had figured how to get his congregation attendance figures up. With so many voices in accord, although not necessarily in tune, it was a miracle that the awning didn't lift off like a giant kite when *'For those in peril on the sea'* reached full throttle.

The quarterdeck was centre of attention again only a couple of days later when, at the completion of the Regatta the prize winners mustered there to receive their prizes from that day's main event. There had been a lot of oars and sails and training and straining over the previous week or so in preparation for the Regatta, as everyone wanted to win and at the end of it all Superb 'B' took the honours from Superb 'A', Veryan Bay and Mounts Bay.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT MONTH

A POINT TO PONDER

22nd of February, 2022 (22/2/2022) will fall on a Tuesday.

So we will be able to call it 2s Day

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Quite a few years back, the then Indian Prime Minister, Indira Ghandi, visited Sydney during the running of the "City to Surf" marathon which was televised throughout the country. She was so impressed with the enthusiasm of all of the runners from all age groups, the excellent physical exercise and the enthusiasm of the crowds.

"What a wonderful idea. I think I will try this back home in India - getting people involved in healthy physical activity, enjoying exercise, the spectacle etc." And a prize to the winner!

When she arrived home, she called all of her Ministers together and told them to get the marathon organised.

One Minister said that, with a lot of people wanting to be involved - especially as there would be fame and fortune to the winner - there would be millions of entrants. "People would be trampled. We couldn't have that. We have such a large population We will have to restrict the numbers."

"Well", she said, "how many people would be in their teens?"

"Maybe 200 million"

"That's far too many. How many Octogenarians?"

"Maybe 50 Million"

"Still too many - How about people who collect stamps?"

"Maybe ten million"

"Still too many people - there would be so many injured in the race that it would not be tolerated." One minister suggested the entrants had to be current or retired Palace eunuchs!

"So how many of those?", she asked.

"Oh, about 500."

"Well, that's what we'll do - just current or former Palace eunuchs. But we can't call a marathon the 'City to Surf'. What do we call it?"

How about 'The Indian Knackerless Five Hundred!', He said.

LIEUTENANT JOHN HARDY R.M.

Team Leader on the Ascent of Mount Kilimanjaro in 1956

By Commodore Richard Lord CBE RN (Rtd)

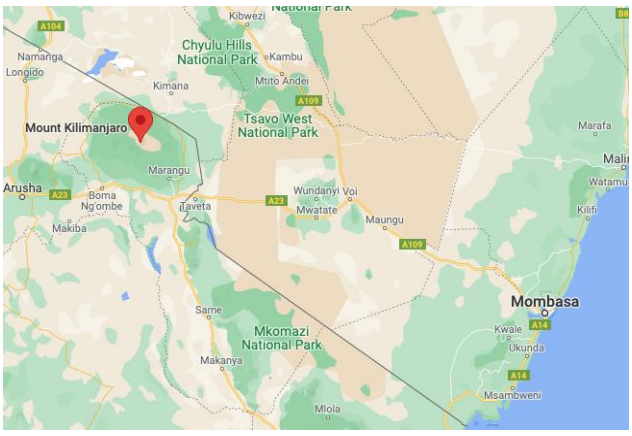
My good friend John Hardy is in a residential care home near to me and I visit him every couple of weeks. His memory is fading fast, and I try to find topics of joint interest. Until recently it was our shared experiences of Gibraltar and Malta but recently his wife passed to me the HMS SUPERB General Service Commission 1956-57 booklet. In it was an article entitled KILIMANJARO, 1956. As I read through it, I realised it was my friend John who had led the team.

This seemed to be an ideal topic for the next visit. His wife gave me the memento (pictured) to see if it would stir memories from 66 years ago.

Firstly though, I read out a letter from your Chairman, Brian Saunders which he had kindly written to say hello from the Association. John was so pleased with the letter and, as it was a lot to take in, I left a copy with the staff to read to him again. Such letters are very much appreciated by your shipmate and his family.

We chatted about the expedition and how approval for the climb had been given at a late stage and to occur whilst the ship was in Mombasa. Kilimanjaro is 19,000 ft high and a considerable challenge as we will see. Cash was tight and the number of porters and guides minimised.

There were 10 in the party, Lt John Hardy, Surg Lt Dobson, Mids Saunt and Harding, Cpls Lewis and Carlyon and Mns Clark, Fraser, Pittard and Munday. (If you know any of these servicemen then please get in touch).



The 200-mile journey across rough country from Mombasa was in a tatty old bus as John recalls. They were unsure whether it would complete the journey. A Model T Ford took them to the Kibo

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Hotel (much improved today as you can see) which John described as being what you might expect! We discussed whether the memento came from there, whether the tree was original and what the plaque lettering HILL was meant to convey. John couldn't remember.

From there upwards it was hard graft, the daily stew provided the calories – anything else being too difficult for the young team to cook.

At 14,000 ft the terrain became worse and having got there that evening was very miserable: all the team had headaches from the cold. The Guide shook them at 2am for the final 4,000ft final climb. John recalls that the Doctor's definition that it was like walking up a mound of marbles, three feet up, then slide back two, was right. Looking at John's face as we spoke about this phase, it was clear that this expedition was no longer fun. Only one of them finally made it to the top – John thinks it might have been him but said it was a difficult time. Asked if a flag was left John indicated that one wasn't. I wasn't sure why. I think there was a real worry about safety of the team and it was time to get back. The photo shows the peak as it is today.

Re-joining up they then set off across the waste between Kibo and Mawenzi to the southwest. With the decrease in altitude their spirits rose. In all 80 miles had been walked and 19,000 ft climbed.

Recalling this expedition with John was a privilege as one senses that at times leadership would have been tested with young men in adverse conditions especially the cold and altitude. John said it was more difficult than expected and further fitness would have been useful. It was with sadness he said that not all could have been successful at reaching the peak.

I can only guess, but this would have been a very challenging time and getting everyone back on-board HMS SUPERB safely in Mombasa was key. I am sure this experience and his time in HMS SUPERB gave John confidence in his leadership and

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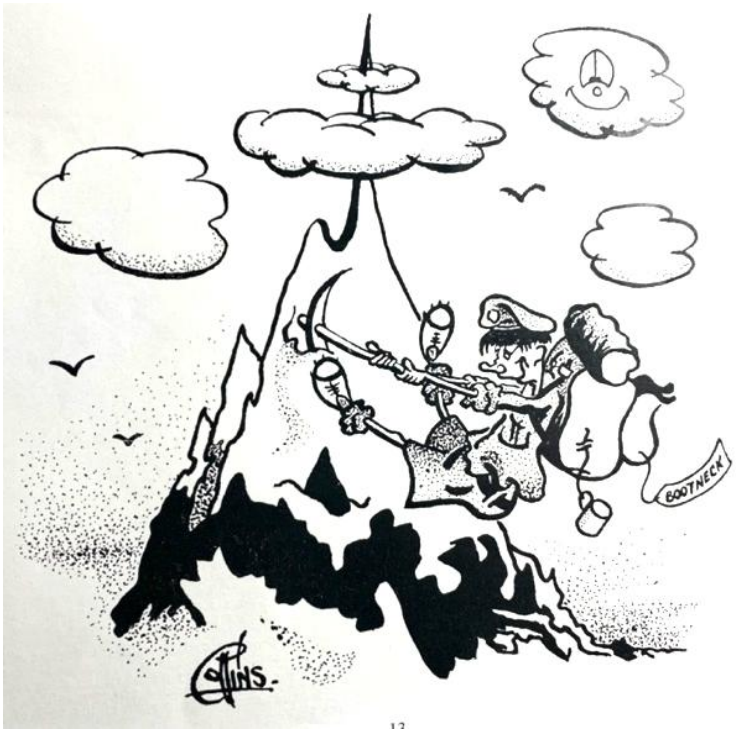
contributed towards his highly successful career as a Royal Marine officer, rising to the Major General rank.

If anyone can provide more information related to the expedition, then please let your Chairman Know and I can discuss it with John in my next visit.

John is very proud of his HMS SUPERB crest at home and the cartoon from 1956 shows John clearly trying to get to the peak! Not sure who the smiley is in the top right-hand corner! Someone looking after them maybe.

Acknowledgement is given to the author (unknown, possibly John) of the original article in the booklet.



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ANOTHER DOOR Part 8:

by Tom Simkins MBE Chief Radio Officer MV 'Pinna'

Colombo and UK

The business over at the Oil Company agents office, we remaining ex-'Pinna' crew, which now included Arthur Greene, were found accommodation at the Mount Lavinia hotel at Mount Lavinia, just a short train ride from Colombo. I did that short train journey so many times during my stay in Ceylon that even now the station stops from Colombo station of Slave Island, Bambalamatia, Colapatia and Moilnt Lavinia are still locked in my memory.

Upon arriving at the hotel, there was another happy re-union for me; this time, 'Pinna's' cadet Shorty Armstrong, and Les Clayton the captain of the 'Ribot' responsible for evacuating the Bukom demolition party and some of the Oil Company staff. They had been lucky in getting away from Bukom unscathed and across to Sumatra, and like Arthur and party, they were fortunate in getting prompt transport help across country to Padang. At the docks, they were not quite so fortunate in that the vessel they boarded - the HMS Encounter' took them backwards to Batavia and not their preferred destination, of Ceylon. However they did get away quickly which must have been about a week before my arrival there in the 'Pengar'.

Although not possessing operational navigational experience (although he was studying the subject) young Shorty accurately piloted a boat load of evacuees in a small craft named the 'Ho Kwahg' out of Tanjong Priok and across the Indian ocean, arriving a short time after Arthur Greene in the collier. Eventually arriving home, Shorty (Ralph Armstrong.) was awarded the BEM and also the Lloyd's medal which he well deserved, not only for his navigational expertise, but also for his stoical work that day on the 'Pinna'

After our varied experiences on and off the water, it was a happy and relaxing interlude, drinking together and enjoying the afforded amenities. The Mount Lavinia hotel, was (and I expect still is) on a rocky outcrop right on the sea shore with the beach framed on one side with the white surf rollers of the Indian ocean, and on the other, coconut palms prolifically endowed. If there was anything that could make us forget there was a war on, it was the millionaire style existence which we enjoyed -for me, six weeks. Those six weeks more than compensated for the worries of the previous six. Mind you, I would not have enjoyed the existence so well if I had known during that time, that the occupation of Ceylon and Australia, the latter via Darwin, was on the Japanese agenda. Also, that they had, between the first and last weeks in March (after their occupation of the Dutch East Indies from northern Sumatra to eastern Java and Timor) occupied the Nicabar and Anderman islands in the Southern Bay of Bengal west of Malaya

Had I known, I might have thought that they were catching up with me again! Had I harboured such a thought, I would not have been so surprised when it materialised that Sunday morning, 5th April. I had awakened quite early to the sound of lashing rain and thunder and had dozed off again, but became conscious again later, thinking that the storm was really developing into a heavy one. Then 'Hells Bells', that not still the storm, its gunfire...lots of it. Looking through the French window door, I could see that the dark sky was riddled with flack. That didn't bother me immediately because I felt there was something else more important to be concerned about. It was those loud rumblings that seemed to be coming across the water, the low flying aircraft, and the long and short bursts of gun-fire from different directions, together with two large explosions behind me.

'Invasion' .. . . . . In thirty seconds flat I was ready for the road. I had travelled about 3000 miles to get away from danger; I wasn't going to get caught on another island. By the time I had got to the bedroom door I was more awake and thinking sanely. A beleaguered Singapore situation just could not have developed overnight....or could it? Out on the veranda I did a quick look-see, but scanning the whole beach left to right and then out to sea, there wasn't a single landing craft or ship to be seen. What was all the noise about, and where were all those aircraft coming from?

I went out into the corridor and banged on George's door and nearly banged him in the face as he it opened and came out. I then made a quick dash back to my room grabbed my skin-out bag and joined George outside. Flights of Japanese aircraft were sailing over the hotel from the direction of the sea without any apparent opposition, and so low that I could see figures inside the cockpits. It seemed that their only target was the RAF base at Ratmalan in the distance somewhere behind the hotel.

Ack-ack guns were now barking with greater intensity it was getting really noisy. One aircraft crashed down in the garden behind the hotel and one plopped down in the sea at the front. Smoke could be seen rising in the direction of the city resulting from a separate flight of aircraft which I learned later, also attacked ships in the harbour.

It really did seem that the battle for Colombo at started Then suddenly, at 9.15, all the activity stopped. the raid sirens wailed the 'all clear' and then the quietness sounded so quiet. Later that day while looking around, we came across the aircraft that had come down. It was a burnt-out shell. so amazingly intact, with the two men inside looking like two skeletons with a few parts missing. A soldier was also wandering about and helping himself to a piece of skull, 'Souvenir', he said.

Although there was a repeat raid on the Naval base at Trincomalee on the other side of the island a few days later, where the HMS 'Hermes', a corvette and two tankers were sunk, Ceylon was not raided again. Strategically both the Japanese attempts were failures, but we did lose

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35 aircraft.; the Japanese may have lost 25. If they expected to do a 'Pearl Harbour' on our fleet at Trincomalee, they must have been disappointed it was not in port

I learned later that both attacks had originated from a Japanese task force, I00 miles south of Ceylon, and I wondered how such a surprise attack could have happened, and a bevy of ships get so near without being detected on radar or by patrolling aircraft. Perhaps the RAF did not patrol, for we didn't see a single aircraft or Naval vessel as we crossed over in the 'Perak'. However, I learned many years later, that a patrolling Catalina aircraft spotted the Japanese fleet, three days before the attack. It was shot down, but not before the signaller had transmitted a report back to base - yet our defences were still taken by surprise!

Well perhaps that was a small price to pay for the surprise the Japanese experienced. With no British fleet at Trincomalee on which to do their 'Pearl Harbour' attacks, and the fact that reconnaissance had pin-pointed the position of the task-force, their worry must have been, where was the British fleet? History now tells us that the Japanese having lost the surprise initiative were not again able to attempt an occupation of Ceylon.

The attack on Ceylon was described by Winston Churchill as 'His most dangerous moment'. For an enemy base there, could have, made a serious difference to the war in the East. An account of this 'Dangerous moment' is covered in Michael Tomlinson's book of that name, from which I have obtained some of the above information.

After the raid on Colombo, the Governor, in a broadcast speech, praised the brave behaviour of the populace, but by the following day they were not so brave as to remain in the city, for there was a grand scale exodus. Thousands left and all kinds of workers downed tools and filled every form of transport moving out of the city. The trains which dwindled to just a few passing through Mount Lavinia station, were packed and bulging with bodies half out of windows, or sitting on the buffers between carriages: there were some perched even more dangerously on top of them.

By this time, George and I were the only ones left in the hotel, all my other companions 'The Singapore harriers', plus the chaps that had arrived before us, had all left for home or joined other ships. George had only recently arrived in the hotel. He was a Blue Funnel line employee recovering from an appendix operation.

I don't know why it was that I was the last one to leave out of the Singapore party. Up to that time I had not been a bit concerned as to how long I stayed at Mount Lavinia, provided that the trouble in my middle didn't get any worse. After the raid,(and this was before we were aware of the permanency of the Japanese withdrawal) the idyllic walks along the palmed beach collecting fallen coconuts for their milk or lying on sand to be washed by the surf, ceased to be the relaxing interlude it had been. My thoughts had now changed to 'I must get away from here

- to keep moving...', that even the relaxation afforded by the hotel service, and its ever open bar, would not dispel. I started to make frequent visits to the Agent's office, on one pretext or another, to ensure that it would not be a case of 'out of sight, out of mind'. I was fed up with islands. They were not a bit safe!

The week laboured on, as did the next one the only change in circumstances were the loaded trains, bulging again, with habitants returning to Colombo. Then suddenly without any previous hint, I received a telephone call late one evening and the following day, April 20th, accompanied by George who had received similar advice. We were to travel on the troopship SS 'Devonshire', bound for Bombay where George and I were to re-embark.

At Bombay, I was glad to leave the very over-crowded and uncomfortable 'Devonshire' in favour of an Australian passenger liner, the SS 'Awatea'.(The "Awatea was later sunk during the North African Invasion in 1942) We sailed on my birthday, April 25th. 1942 bound for somewhere in the UK, unaccompanied because of the 'Awatea's" high speed, and blacked-out.

After calling at Durban, and then Capetown where I equipped myself with wardrobe more suitable for weather at home, we then jig-zagged our way at high speed west, far into the Atlantic in order to present a more difficult target for German U-boats. Like the 'Devonshire' the 'Awatea' was also 'full to the gunwales' but this time, with Polish military personnel, with some room left for civilian passengers. The Poles were a courteous. happy. cheerful and noisy crowd, taking over all that was available by way of the amenities aboard which included the few female passengers the latter with much bowing and heel clicking. Remembering the voyage now, it seems that George and I who shared a cabin, spent most of our time reading every book in the ship's library, with occasional exercise on deck, when it was not too congested. In addition to that exercise, I made many extra compulsory walks between my cabin - which was three or four decks down - and the open deck, and also from the library and dining room, so that I knew every straight, bend, corner and stairway in detail. My experiences to date had left me with an extreme sense of self-preservation phobia, coupled with my Boy Scout motto of 'Be Prepared'. I wasn't going to trust the emergency lighting should we be torpedoed; the last one had not worked.(George said he hadn't been a Boy Scout!)

Just when I thought that if we didn't alter course we might be seeing the South American coast we headed north, after which we approached 'Home' from around the north coast of Ireland. We sailed up the Clyde; the green hills were beautiful in the morning sun. We docked at Glasgow the date was the 31st of May – exactly three years since . I departed from London on the 'Corfu'. Sadder and wiser?, not particularly. A bit older? yes. Experienced? .. , very much so.

The journey home by train was similar to the many journeys I was to make between ports of arrival and departure as the war progressed. Blacked-out carriages with either dim or no

lighting at all, making it impossible when travelling at night, to read. Numerous stops some of short duration and some as long as a couple of hours due to an air-raid or the aftermath of one. Crowded carriages because of the volume of military passengers in addition to the civilians. If one were lucky, a seat, otherwise the guard's van or the draughty corridor.

I had almost forgotten the indigenous and familiar smell of smoke from the engine and the sound of escaping steam; the clanging of milk churns; porters opening and closing doors, calling and assisting with luggage rarely seen today. Then the poo..ooff of the moving engine. The blacked-out stations had their name-boards removed for the same reason that roads where without signposts, so it was always a puzzle as to where one was along the route of the journey.

Just off the platform and through the light-proof doors and curtains the station buffet was another world of brightness and seeming plenty. Spirits were hard to get but beer was plentiful and of course, tea by the gallon. I found the station buffets always a happy oasis in a desert of railway lines well, there was the occasional 'Hey don't you know there's a war on?'. From my experience a station buffet of today cannot compare with the cheerful atmosphere of the same place during the war years.

On this particular journey, I caught my train at Glasgow in the late afternoon, and travelling into the late evening, changing trains three times. Clickerty-clacking through a completely blacked-out world after dark was a new and eerie experience....like travelling through a pitch-black desert. Because the old railway lines still had their expansion joints, speed at night could only be assessed by the rate of the clickety-clacks. As the carriage wheels rolled over them. During the daylight it was a happy journey through pleasant countryside with which I had been so familiar in peace time. I don't remember seeing anything untoward that indicated that I was back in a Britain at war. In consequence the dark foreboding I had experienced the night before docking, as to how I would find things at home, slowly melted away, and upon arriving at my destination, even dingy Grimsby Town was welcoming in as much as it was still dingy looking.

I was expected home since my telegram from Glasgow had heralded the event. When I stepped over the threshold - it was 2am - my father said 'They've been feeding you well', and my mother said "Oh you've lost your golden hair" (my hair was now quite dark) Next day, sitting in my ham shack in the garden, where I had first put my adventurous thoughts into action and burnt so many midnight candle hours studying, it seemed to have shrunk somewhat. Since all privately owned transmitting radio equipment had been impounded during the war, mine was also missing for the duration. Lying on the desk beneath a pair of pliers was my Marconi Telegram "Report.....'. Was it only three years and a bit since I had responded to the instruction and closed the shack door?

As I sat on the chair where I had studied for so long and had fantasised adventures on the high seas, it crossed my mind that I never did lean on that rail and smoke a pipe.

The summer of 1942 passed all too quickly, amounting to four months at home, comprising accumulated leave (having been away for three years) plus a period of sick leave. A few things got in the way of complete relaxation in the form of a dose of shingles, my recurring problems in my middle which necessitated investigation, and air-raids. Interestingly enough, it was our dog who was agitating to get down the garden to the air raid shelter quite a few minutes before air-raid sirens could be heard by us. Being so near to the Grimsby docks- airborne time - frequent warnings were inevitable, but not always a hazard.

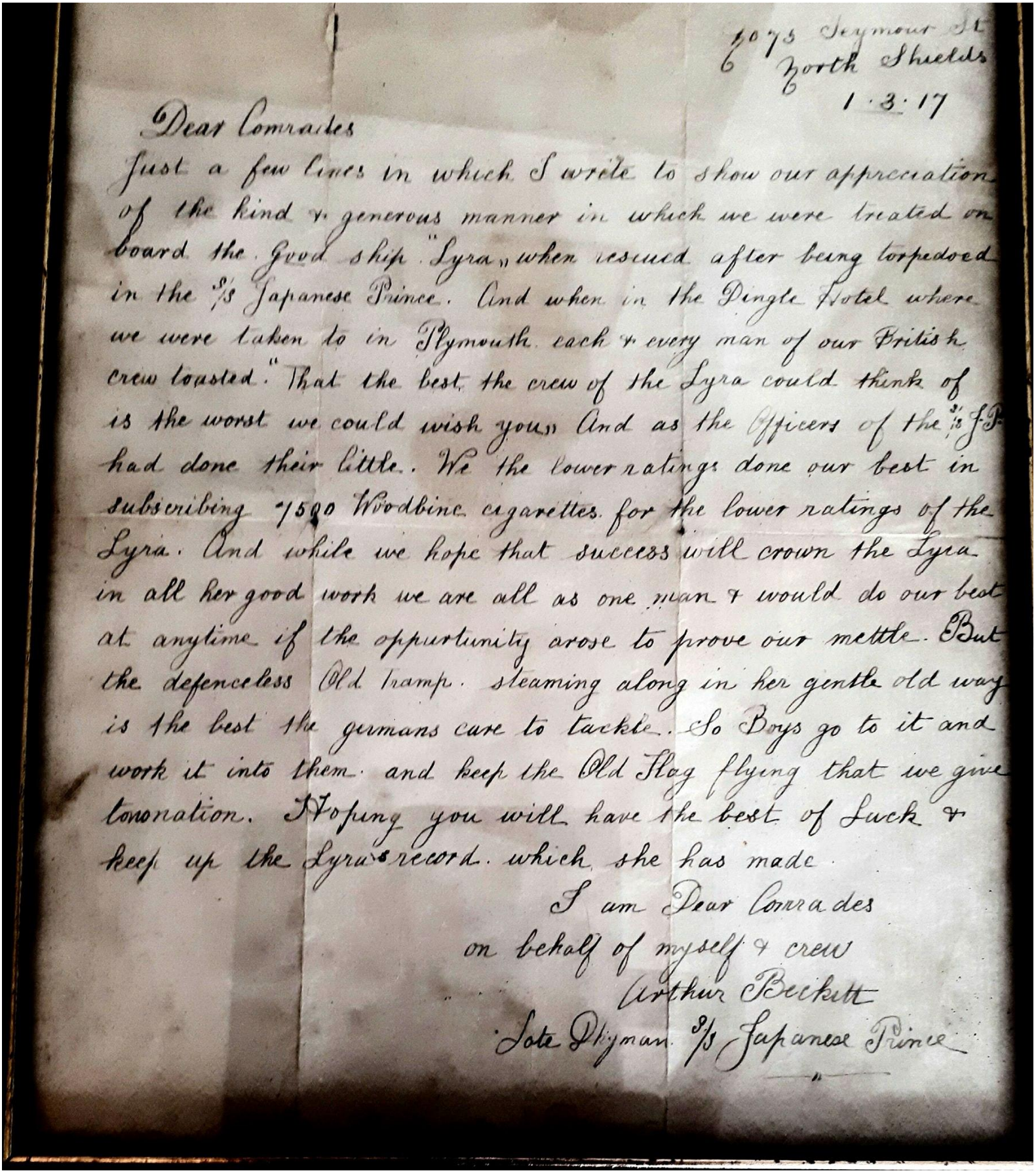
After being so well fed at sea, it wasn't easy to adapt to the war-time rationing (note 7) although I don't recall suffering unduly. As the war progressed, the food situation in our house improved as brother Frank and I returned home from voyages abroad, particularly from Canada and America, loaded with a variety of tinned foods and other commodities that were hard to obtain, even on 'points'

There were two happy occasions when Frank's and my return from sea coincided with sister Olive's 48 hours leave from the WAAF. We made the best of wartime conditions of blacked out streets and roads and the lack of transport. although this was partially solved by borrowing bicycles. Frank knew a young lady by the name of Jean Hardy and he introduced me on a casual meeting, then later, we visited her home where her parents owned a long established photographic business and studios in Cleethorpes. It so happened that Jean was home on vacation from the teachers training college in Bingley, and so the friendship blossomed. I didn't know at that time that she was destined to be my wife several years later. Marriage at that time was not on my war time agenda – not knowing what survival points were being marked up for me in the great scheme of things.

During that summer went to London twice visiting the Oil Company and my employers, Marconi Company. As I wandered around, it was very disturbing sight be see the extent of the bomb damage caused during the worst of Hitler's blitz, and a unique experience travelling on the underground, where, night and day, access to the tube train was over numerous sleeping bodies occupying the platforms which were also serving as very safe air-raid shelters. The eerie sound of the air-raid sirens, and the ensuing activity on the streets as the populace took shelter, certainly brought home to me, more than the descriptive radio broadcasts what the people of London and other cities had endured night after night during the worst of the air-raids. There were no air-raids during my second visit ton London, consequently I slept peacefully at the Royal Hotel Kingsway. My accommodation cost me 12/6d a night, bed and breakfast. I doubt if 63p equivalent in today's money would now pay fur my return fare on the bus between King's Cross station and the hotel.

NEXT MONTH: ANOTHER DOOR PART 9: NORTH AFRICA

PHOTO ALBUM

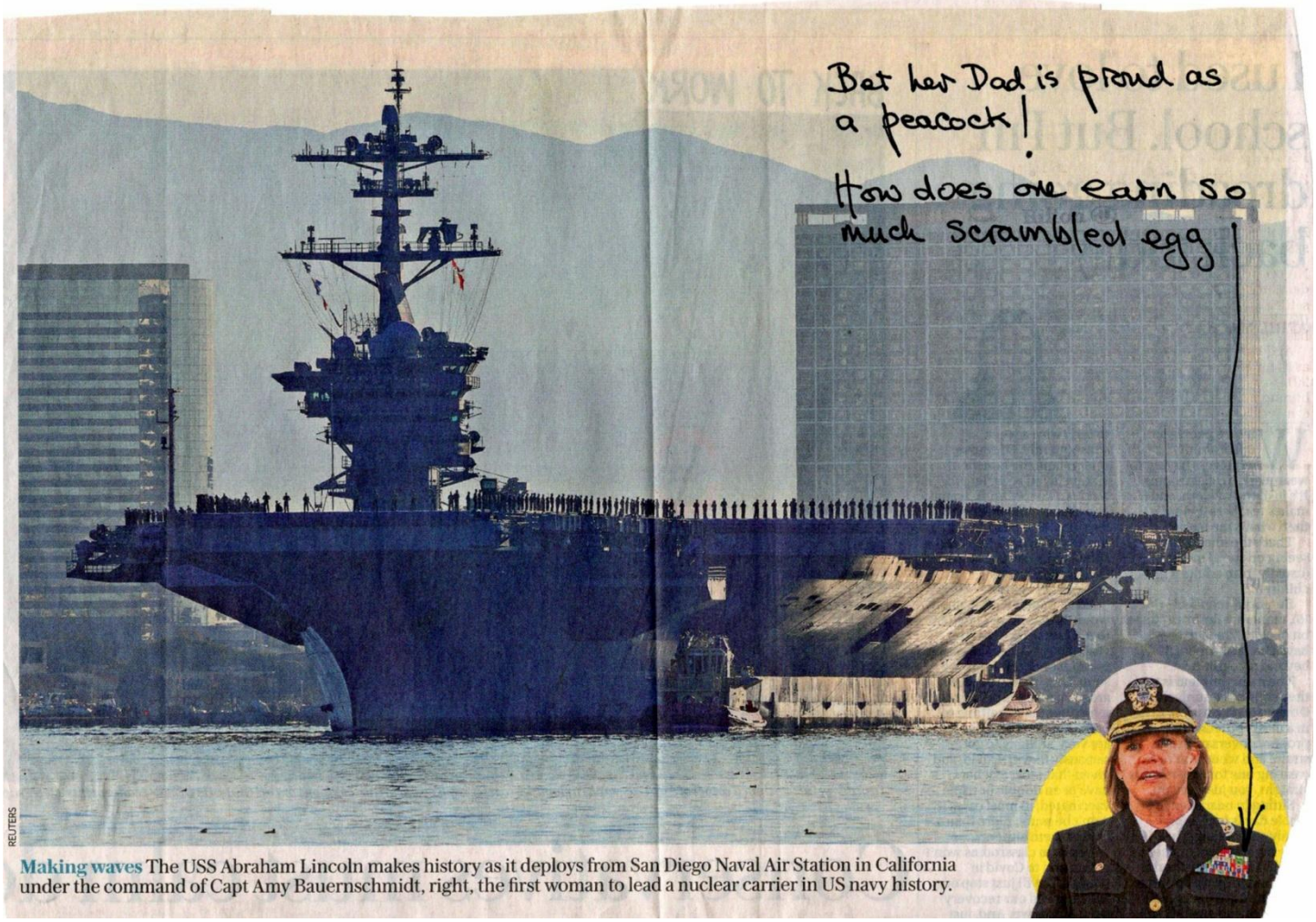


207 Seymour St
North Shields
1.3.17

Dear Comrades

Just a few lines in which I write to show our appreciation of the kind & generous manner in which we were treated on board the Good ship "Lyra" when rescued after being torpedoed in the S/S Japanese Prince. And when in the Dingle Hotel where we were taken to in Plymouth each & every man of our British crew toasted "That the best the crew of the Lyra could think of is the worst we could wish you" And as the Officers of the S/S J.P. had done their little. We the lower ratings done our best in subscribing £500 Woodbine cigarettes for the lower ratings of the Lyra. And while we hope that success will crown the Lyra in all her good work we are all as one man & would do our best at anytime if the opportunity arose to prove our mettle. But the defenceless Old Tramp. steaming along in her gentle old way is the best the germans care to tackle. So Boys go to it and work it into them. and keep the Old Flag flying that we give Coronation. Hoping you will have the best of Luck & keep up the Lyra's record. which she has made

I am Dear Comrades
on behalf of myself & crew
Arthur Beckett
Late Plyman S/S Japanese Prince



Making waves The USS Abraham Lincoln makes history as it deploys from San Diego Naval Air Station in California under the command of Capt Amy Bauernschmidt, right, the first woman to lead a nuclear carrier in US navy history.

Capt. Amy Bauernschmidt is now the commanding officer of the aircraft carrier Abraham Lincoln — becoming the first woman to lead a nuclear carrier in U.S. Navy history.

Bauernschmidt, who previously served as the carrier's executive officer from 2016-2019, relieved Capt. Walt "Sarge" Slaughter of his duties Aug. 19 during a change of command ceremony in San Diego.

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)

George Garner, AB on board between 1954-55. Crossed the Bar June, 1996

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