

Hello Shipmates,

In my last news letter I recall a brief something about the Norway debacle. Since then the Battle of Britain programmes, and the R.A.F. being the nation's "saviour against invasion", flourished on TV. I was prompted to see exactly how the Royal Navy contributed to prevent a channel crossing by 'Evil Adolph' and 'Fat Herman'.

**April 7th 1940:** Heavy cruiser *Hipper*, 14 destroyers plus battleships *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau* sailed for Narvik with merchant vessels; between them were 3700 troops.

U.K. Air Recon, tasked with the cover of British R.N. units mining Norway's coast, detected all those enemy vessels. By the 22nd of May the *Kriegsmarine* had lost 18 war ships, including 3 cruisers and 10 destroyers. The Luftwaffe lost 242 aircraft.

Knowing what the R.N. had, in home waters, to deter further *Kriegsmarine* assets from adventures in the channel it must have been easy for Adolph's advisers to dissuade him with numbers... The upside to his problem was that all ports and airfields of Norway had been successfully occupied.

At the end of December, start of January 'an upheaval' was planned and executed here at home; first part secret from me, second part I had a feeling of being press ganged into something I did not want; that's just to explain how pressgangs came to mind.



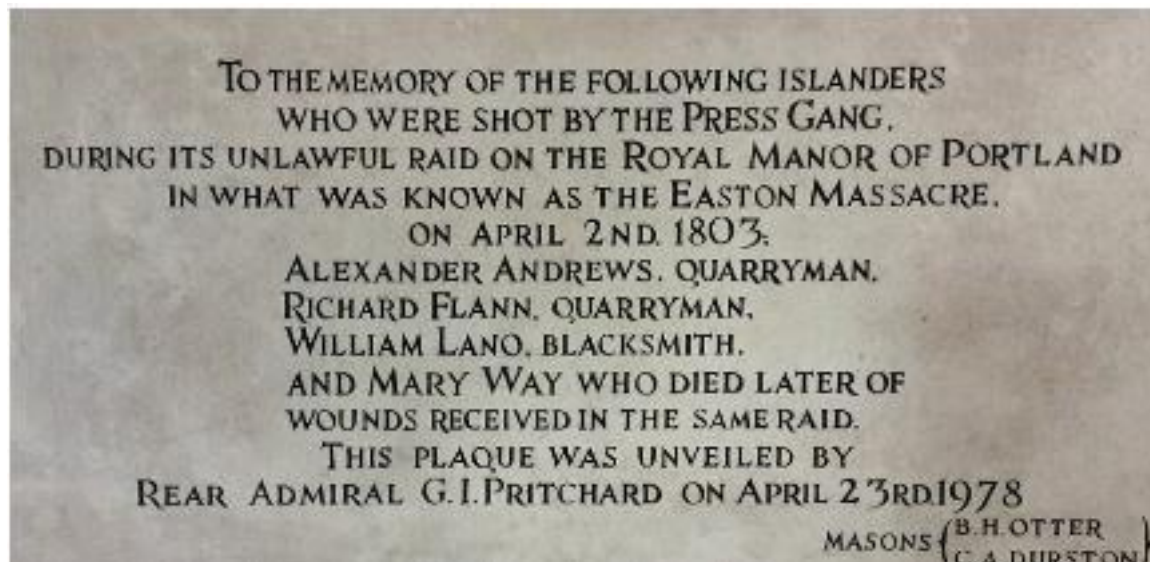
Historical lurid depictions of who did that job, and the poor victims, in cinema, on TV etc. made one dread such an event.

Impressment was a time-honoured 'legal right of the U.K. Crown, to the labour of its seafaring population' in war time; the alternative being conscription, as practised by France, Spain and Denmark. Evidently the R.N. rarely impressed lands men. Tales of press gangs sweeping up non-seafarers from towns were largely a myth created by political oppositions to back their campaign for abolishment in 1830 - 40s of impressment. In reality men were picked out who could handle 'sails and yards' of large warships, it being taken as an operational hazard of deep water sailors, most of whom volunteered to accept the decent bounty paid.

So long as war lasted in 1793/1814 the R.N.'s need of men was endless as she fought most of the world's navies. Disease and shipwreck decimated crews; 'battles' were the least cost by a large margin!

Approximately 150,000 were needed to man our fleet, a reported 24000 lost to disease in the West Indies alone; methods of manning the fleet reads as being complicated, complex and costly.

Napoleon's conscription laws, to man his vast land army, denuded the countryside of those who



produced her food, the farmers; severe food shortage wrecked the state.

France and Spain doubled their fleets by 1790

thus leaving the once dominant R.N. outnumbered. Critically so in the larger classes; that's when their policy of 'fighting to capture' took off, eventually resulting in a rough parity of fleets.

The subject is not the simple tale I once thought, convoluted to a point dates and occurrences have my feeble mind in a muddle

Should pressing hold your interest try the book by J Ross Dancy entitled 'The Myth of Press Gang'; volunteers impressment and naval man power problems late eighteenth century; by Boydell press, Suffolk.

During that time the 'capture policy' put considerable cash into the lower deck for seamen, many wardroom members became quite rich - a prime incentive for 'aggressive boarding', 'engaging the enemy more closely'.

Talk of riches in the marine sector; I can only wonder why a struggling out-sourcing company Capita is awarded, by the M.O.D., a 1 billion pound contract to train all personnel in both the Royal Navy and Royal Marines in all 16 R.N. shore establishments.

You have, no doubt, read in newsprint how Capita already perform miserably on some current government contracts. I forgot to mention it is for 12 years.

I view the best training for the young to get the service ethos and 'character spirit' would come from retired officers and men, out of service and looking for a decent pensionable job of importance to the nation.

I cannot imagine my Shotley Gunnery or Seamanship instructor replaced by a civilian of 'civil service' mentality; a staunch union member no doubt.

I have consulted the village Shaman; he is adamant all you Association men are due a superb '21; you only have to lay back and enjoy it - execute immediately!!!

Honest Abe.