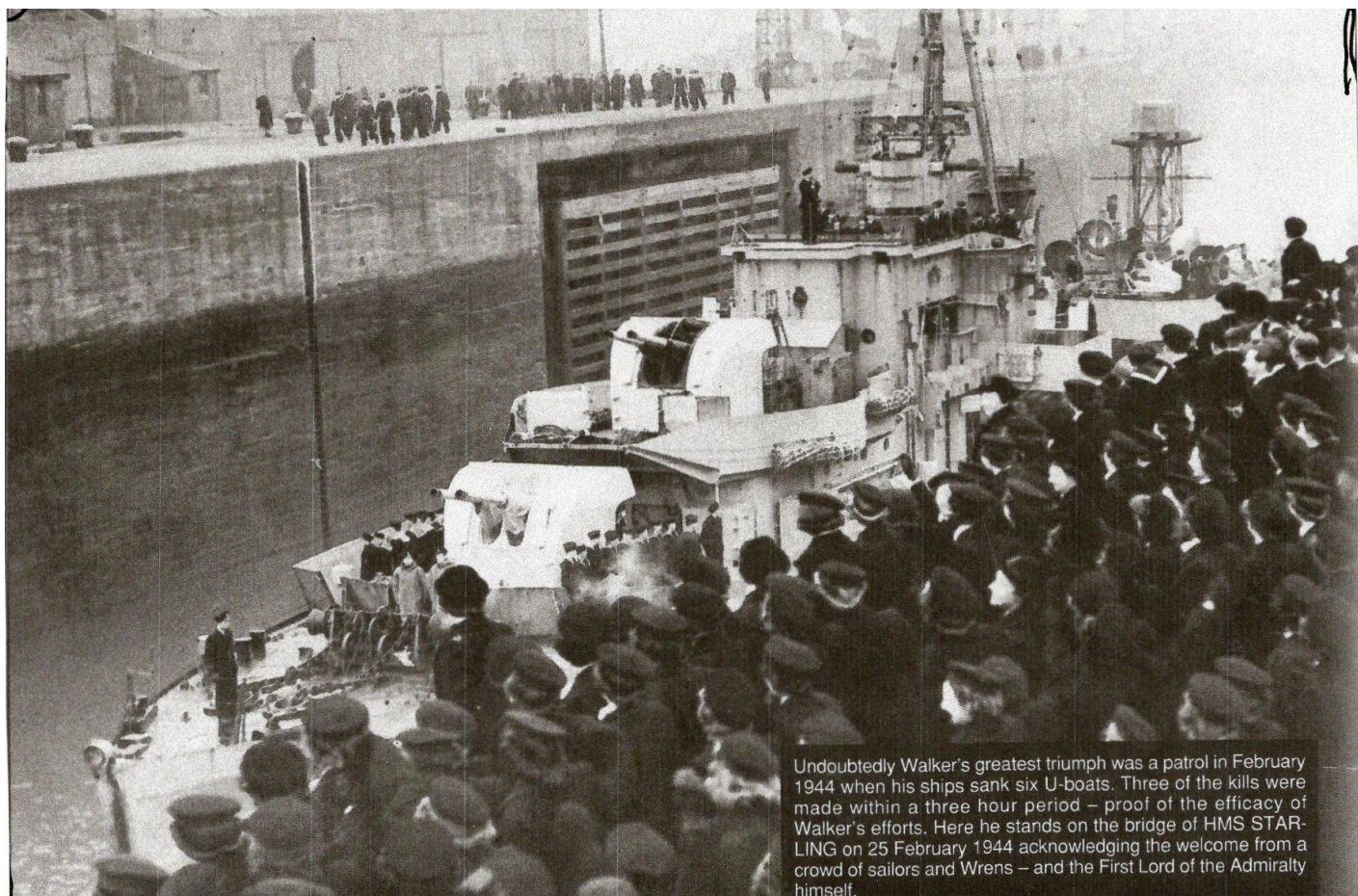




## ANDY BRIERLEY'S BLOG

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.



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 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



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?

