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CHAIRMAN OF THE ASSOCIATION, BRIAN SAUNDERS

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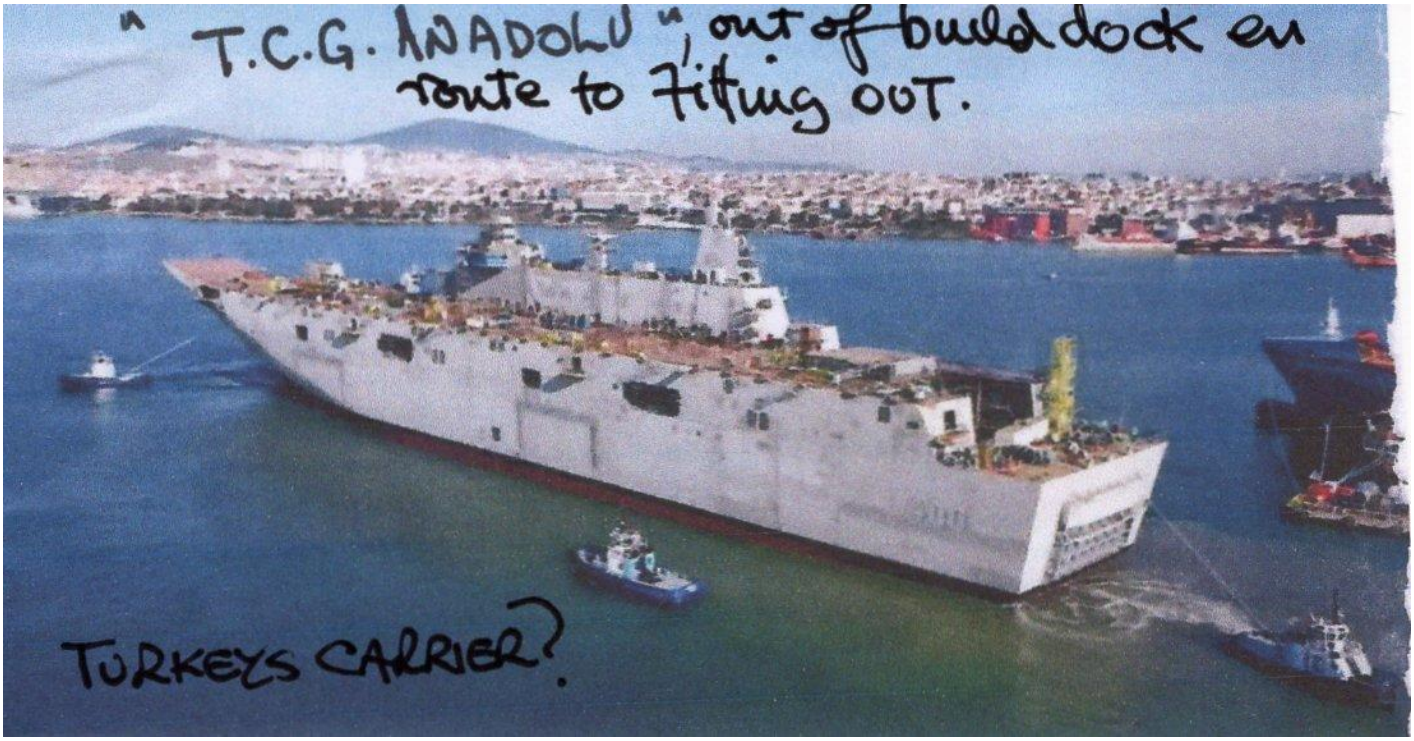
ANDY BRIERLEY'S BLOG

Hello Shipmates,

We could call this Black Sea 2

Bit of a coincidence that the area should be my interest in last month's newsletter .....



A couple of days later Destroyer *Diamond* caused a furore off Crimea. I learn Ukraine has a contract with Turkey, who now supplies them with advanced drones, re-con and attack capable; that really must tick the Russians off. If an alliance between those two countries becomes close, and Ukraine is accepted into N.A.T.O. they will be the third non-E.E.C. member, with the U.K. and Turkey. I find it hard to understand why N.A.T.O. member Turkey decided, about a year and a half ago, to purchase from Russia an air defence missile system S400. The immediate result of that was the U.S. government banning Turkey's part in the massive F35 programme, not wanting its technology going back the other way to Russia. The complication for Turkey is compounded by the fact they have a nearly completed hull of the Spanish designed flat top by Navantia, a multi-purpose, so called, L.P.H (landing platform helicopters). Exactly like the duo just delivered to Australia – *H.M.A.S. Canberra and Adelaide.*

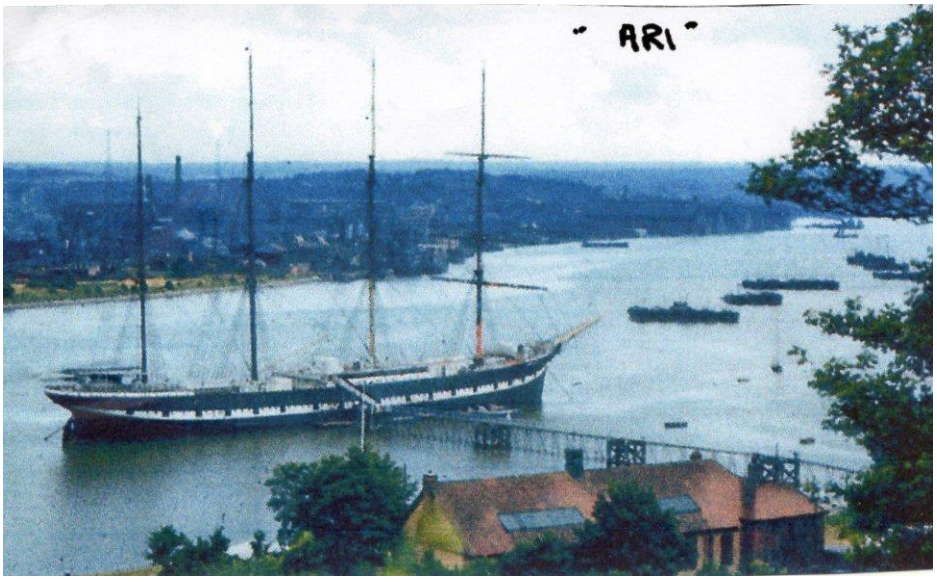
The Spanish, of course, operate their own build of the design; one called Juan Carlos operates Harriers to this day; their second hull acts as disaster relief vessel. Who would have thought

that Turkey had desire to be an aircraft carrier operator, then have plans thwarted by such a thoughtless move.

Hark back to last month's letter – origin of China's high tech – this picture illustrates a JIS (Ukraine Flanker upgrade), about to snag a wire on Lioning (ex-Ukraine build for Russian carrier contract).

Another continuation from last month's story – R.A.F. Coltishall; a true tale of a particular waypoint on recon exercises by their Jaguars over Welsh hills, a regular route passed over a lonely barn that infuriated the farmer as they scared his sheep. On the barn roof, in biggest possible letters he painted PISS OFF. Developed photos of the route became a squadron highlight, all pilots wanted their copy; as you may imagine the poor farmer ended up with far more than he bargained for with low flyers getting even lower.

Not many of our vintage will have served not knowing an ARI BOY; a Shaftsbury Homes, *Arethusa* resident. For near 40 years she was moored at Upnor on the Medway, exactly opposite St. Mary's Island off Chatham dockyard. I made a special effort to see her in Sheerness Dockyard being prepared in 1973 for a tow to Seaport Museum, New York. Much later did see her once in was lacking urgent TLC. Perhaps not being a U.S. build had it down their priority list. The trustees of that place decided



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it no longer fitted their plans. A final solution of scrapping was averted when Hamburg made provision to have it transported back there on a heavy lifting ship. Being of 1911 build that was very wise as several feet of concrete had been poured in the hull; it's been removed 'pig pen forward', restored, fo'csle bell returned to its proper place.

Living in this area since leaving the Andrew I saw her so often in the nice Upnor village location and am very pleased Germany saved her from the torch; after many things in her life, including providing grist for the Royal Navy's manpower mill.

The M.O.D. hides in the small print another of its 'super deals'. Most recent Air to Air Missile in U.S. inventory is the A.I.M.120 D.; 200 were ordered in 2018, none are fitted to a Typhoon as none have been delivered. Quoted price $650 million. How do we squirm out of that balls up?

I would guess the Typhoons in question are the 24 languishing in storage since being built.

They are tranche one models, so by now must be stuck to the store floor by cobwebs, plus un-airworthy. One cannot help musing if that pair of 'super' carriers had left Rosyth equipped with proper carriers, arrestor wires etc. for a relatively meagre sum, in the scheme of things. The M.O.D. could have fitted hooks to a strengthened rear end, upped undercarriage strength of those 24 Typhoons and clewed up with a very creditable fourth generation strike jet. That would allow a dozen on each vessel. Add half a dozen F35 B models, so called Jump Jets, to ice an operator's cake.

Our Navy has proven experience to make that package a real tough nut. It goes without saying: "A quick absolute divorce" from the dead hand of senior R.A.F. officers would bestow ultimate credibility. Do recall they were heavier than air experts who left Fleet Air Arm with 3-man crew, swordfish, biplanes to combat ME 109s and such when Adolph's battle cruisers made their channel dash. The F.A.A. did not inherit one decent aircraft to face the 2nd world war; a crime to their expected pilots and crews. Only when Grumman sold their cat series, that the R.N. called Martlets, did they have a decent expectation of life.

Remember Captain Winkle Brown? He used them to spectacular effect. A stroll in Gillingham cemetery will bring you across the F.A.A. leader of the channel fiasco, Esmonde, V.C. He is amongst row upon row of headstones of ships and crew members spanning many years, an education of sorts.

Esmonde, shot down into the channel, was considered lost until his body washed up a couple of days later. The R.A.F. never showed up for that prime target about 16 miles from Dover; as useful as hens' teeth. I don't blame the workers; the management was out of touch. A not unusual sight, sound in the untidy corner of the conservatory that I habituate, is a Spitfire or Hurricane, rarely a Mustang, doing a lazy bank to or from whatever commemoration is taking place on the day.

Most times I think en route to that large B of B memorial near Folkstone. I have said to Jo: "Wonder what's on today"; she offered Diana's statue was to be unveiled by princes William and Harry. Wondered what on this regular flight path were the navigation way points; 2 massive local chimneys from redundant power stations have been 'blown' down so maybe the, now active, Southend (Rochford) airport has a beacon role to play.

I waited expectantly for the much talked of piece by an English sculptor, the subject pose

chosen by the princes. I do have a liking for portrait sculpture. This had absolutely no appeal for me, thought it totally non-descript, lacking any kind of impact. Garden created as part of unveiling was a glorious effort in colour. Media has fed us a surfeit of Diana; I hope new matters, to affect the general good, will take over and population will get back to work.

Had a cropful of empty offices that fail to answer calls. The N.H.S. backlog blamed on everything but next door's cat, but it got them awarded the George Cross; I thought it was a joke. That award is forever devalued. Grey suits on six figures will take all accolades – for swift action, forward planning, silky smooth organisation, and transparency diversity adherence. Have you spotted the deliberate mistake?

Grumpy old man signs off.

~ Johnny Carson...
If life were fair, Elvis would still be alive today and all the impersonators would be dead.

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After every flight, UPS pilots fill out a form, called a 'gripe sheet,' which tells mechanics about problems with the aircraft. The mechanics correct the problems; document their repairs on the form, and then pilots review the gripe sheets before the next flight.

Never let it be said that ground crews lack a sense of humour. Here are some actual maintenance complaints submitted by UPS pilots (marked with a P) and the solutions recorded (marked with an S) by maintenance engineers.

P: Left inside main tire almost needs replacement.

S: Almost replaced left inside main tire.

P: Test flight OK, except auto-land very rough.

S: Auto-land not installed on this aircraft.

P: Something loose in cockpit

S: Something tightened in cockpit

P: Dead bugs on windshield.

S: Live bugs on back-order.

P: Autopilot in altitude-hold mode produces a 200 feet per minute descent

S: Cannot reproduce problem on ground.

P: Evidence of leak on right main landing gear.

S: Evidence removed.

P: DME volume unbelievably loud.

S: DME volume set to more believable level.

NOZZERS GO WEST Part 26

Later, one of the British schoolboys, an excited nine-year old called John Cotter, displayed his arms bearing a collection of nine stamps and proudly declared that he would never wash them off. He told Ginger he had seen Superb coming in a few days previously, when she was firing her 21 gun salute. He said the children thought the ship had come all the way from England just to invite them on board. Even as a nine year old he was aware of the occasion and, in his way, said how proud to be British he felt, when the motor launch came to pick them up.

'It was a wonderful sight as the boat came to get us, with the sailors in whites raising and lowering boathooks in time with each other. We were conscious of the passengers waiting for the ferry looking at us and very proud to be British as we crossed the bay with our new found nautical friends on our way to a British warship.'

Ginger enjoyed himself. He was duty for the afternoon watch so he had no choice in being out on the upper deck anyway but with his knack of misunderstanding orders or manipulating them to his advantage, he had what amounted to a free afternoon in the sunshine really. Those young schoolkid's keenness, and interest in every part of the ship engulfed him and he was caught up in the general fervor, almost as if he were one of them and seeing things for the first time. The mundane tasks such as scrubbing the quarterdeck, pulling through the four-inch guns after a shoot or painting the iron boat deck were temporarily forgotten as he guided his little band of pilgrims through the pirate's cave and the slide on the boat deck to sitting on the seats on the pom-poms and the Bofor guns, turning the handles and making them swing round and up and down crazily to up to the fo'c's'le where the capstan had been transformed into a roundabout for the afternoon. Looking round and seeing swarms of young children oblivious to everything except having a grand old time, Ginger was reminded of a piece in the Times of Brazil newspaper, written that very day:

'…here is a cruiser with quite formidable armament, a cruiser that could, if the occasion demanded, become very businesslike in less time than it takes to tell. Yet there is nothing but warm friendship for all nations as this ship plies the seas….'

Ginger recalled those words he had read earlier in the day and reflected how true they were. It was almost as if the local reporter had written them with some kind of foresight or anticipation of the day's events. Surveying the scene in front of him with its festive atmosphere he could easily believe that he was watching some kind of funfair. It was hardly conceivable that the floating funfair could be transformed into a fully functioning fighting machine, spitting death and destruction, in less than an hour.

There had to be, of course, a more formal side to things sometimes and occasionally this was the case. The whole commission had acquired the secondary title of the 'Showing the Flag Cruise' so naturally, whenever the opportunity arose, a fully ceremonial parade would be staged to show the flag. It gave the people that had done all that rifle drill training in Bermuda Dockyard a chance to put it into practice and show the world how well their lessons had been learnt.

Rio gave them another chance to demonstrate their skills, this time to an appreciative Brazilian public. As always, led by the band of the Royal Marines with corporal Pete Tasker, the Drum Major at their head, the 60-plus strong seaman guard, resplendent in their whites, marched from the dock area to the Pantheon building in the Praca Rio Branco ready for Vice-Admiral Sir John Stevens KBE CB, Commander-in-Chief, America and West Indies, to lay a wreath at the Pantheon do Andradas. Admiral Stevens had joined Superb for the spring cruise from his residence in Bermuda. Other Brazilian naval authorities and a Brazilian naval contingent also attended. The Royal Marines band played both Brazilian and British national anthems. The same newspaper later reported that for the half hour ceremony, the traffic along both sides of the main road was held up and everyone waited patiently, 'impressed by the ceremony of sincerity and brilliant drill of the Royal Navy'.

Once again, the *Times of Brazil* did the ship proud with a glowing report:

'The appearance of the Superb and the startling precision and smartness of the officers and men on their ceremonial occasions has made a profound impression among Brazilians and has brought a glow into the heart of every Britisher privileged to witness them. In no less measure has there been the same impression and pride over the general conduct and bearing of the libertymen about town'.

For Ginger everything was new and exciting. Ever since he first arrived in Bermuda, what seemed like ages ago now, he had been taken up with the atmosphere that bordered on the exotic. The whole *foreign feel* of the place – and later, other places – were glamorous and colourful. It was all new to him and something he had not encountered before. The palm trees, the trinkets from street traders in foreign countries, the colourful characters all added to the ambiance. He was a stranger on strange soil and, despite the setbacks and frustrations heaped upon him by the ship and her cohorts; he loved every minute of it. The sights, sounds and smells of the tropics were all new to him. It was one thing to read about such places in books back in England but pictures in books, he now knew, couldn't capture the atmosphere and feel of such places.

Now, in Rio de Janeiro and for reasons unknown, his situation became clear to him. Rio was a nice place to be and although some of the older hands grumbled that it was tame and nothing much for them to do, Ginger began to see things in a different light. He had been harassed continually by a couple of thin ringers, the Chief Buffer, the Chief Quartermaster, the messdeck POs and various other bods that were having a bad day, ever since he arrived on the ship but now it was almost as if a light had been switched on in his head, a light in the darkness at long last. Sod 'em all. This was Rio de Janeiro. A place where people pay hundreds of pounds

to fly to for holidays and he was here, not only free of charge but with money to spend on having a good time.

He'd had a few good runs ashore in the past, either getting drunk with his mess mates or selecting souvenirs and pennants to take home with him but the ship had always been in the back of his mind; the ship that he had to return to reasonably sober and reasonably dressed or some idiot drunk with power over a young boy seaman would be there to jump all over him.

From now on, he told himself, things would be different. Things would be approached with a different attitude. The ship could look after herself and his first priority would be geared to him enjoying himself. There had been enough of him keeping out of the way and from now on he had as much right as anyone else and if they didn't like it they could stay out of his way.

For a change they would remain in harbour for the weekend and that suited Ginger just fine and it would be his weekend off. He had been ashore once during their stay and that was to the beach party where there had been no provision to spend much money, due to the generosity of the British families that had laid on a splendid afternoon for them. That meant he had the bulk of his last pay still intact and two days, Saturday and Sunday to spend it. He also knew that they would be leaving harbour before midday on Monday and Sunday would be open to visitors again. That was two good reasons to get ashore on both days. He also knew that when they got to sea it would be nine days before they would get ashore again and in between times the 'Golden Eagle' would grace them with another payday.

Saturday was designated a 'rabbit-run' and most of the occupants of the boys mess, realising that it could well be their last chance for souvenir shopping, headed down the gangway and into town. Ginger picked himself a nice silk pennant to add to his growing collection. It was not as colourful as some from other countries but it portrayed Lo Corcovado and Sugar Loaf mountains and that was just what he wanted. Others loaded up with crocodile skin cases and handbags and purses made for various animal skins, no doubt destined for mothers and girlfriends back home.

Rio's economy was going through a bad patch and most things were very cheap, due to the falling currency, Ginger wasn't particularly interested in Brazilian currency, falling or otherwise, he was just glad to know that his pay would stretch that much further. He touched lucky in that through not being able to get ashore in Santos, their last port of call, he hadn't been able to change his money and those that had found they were out of pocket because the rate fell so quickly that during their overnight trip down the river to Rio, their Brazilian money had devalued and the English pounds were worth a whole lot more. Even so, with money still in their pockets, most of the last minute shoppers trooped back aboard in time for the evening meal. It was a lovely day and they'd had a very pleasant, if somewhat sober, afternoon out. There was no point in hanging it out until the very last minute for the sake of a couple of more beers and missing the last meal of the day and, in any case, tomorrow was, as yet, untouched.

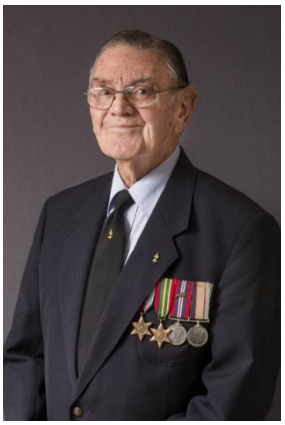
TO BE CONTINUED

ABLE SEAMAN MOSS BERRYMAN

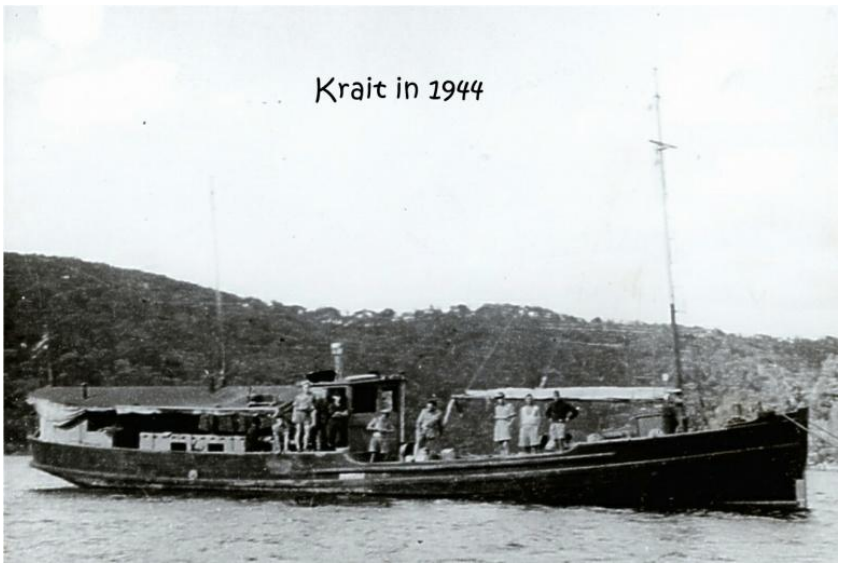
Able Seaman 'Moss' Berryman, who had died aged 96, was the last survivor Operation Jaywick, perhaps the most long-ranged and daring special forces raid of the Second World War.

On April 7, 1942, as soon as he was able, Berryman volunteered for the Royal Australian Navy. He and his friend, Able Seaman Fred Marsh, were still under training in Melbourne when they heard that a British officer was looking for volunteers to do something special.

'A few days later, we were told to pack our bags, we were leaving the navy depot, and we were going to a commando school at Frankston. They taught us a few things that they teach commandos and then at the end of a few weeks, we found ourselves on the Sydney express that night. We were taken out to the Hawkesbury River to a quiet little bay, Refuge Bay, and we landed on the beach there amongst a great heap of tents and camp stretchers … and cooking utensils. Our instructions were to get all this stuff up to the top of this dirty great big cliff. We were told the quicker you get the tent up, and the quicker you get your bed made, the quicker you can have a feed". They discovered that they were members of Z Force, commanded by Harrow-educated Major Ivan Lyon, and part of Special Operations Australia, formed to operate behind Japanese lines in South East Asia. "My mate and I looked sideways at each other. We were basically Sunday school boys. We had no idea how we were going to learn to kill people".



However, on September 2, 1943 Berryman, now a fully trained commando, with seven other British and Australians under Lyons' command, and six boat's crew sailed north from Exmouth Gulf, Western Australia in the 70-ft former Japanese fishing vessel *Kofuku Maru*, now name *Krait*, after a small poisonous snake. Only once at sea did Lyon tell them that they were off to Singapore, some 3,500 miles away, "to blow up a few ships". Berryman knew that the Japanese did not have a reputation for treating prisoners well, but "we were young ones, we thought we were indestructible, just like they do today", and Lyon maintained morale by


Krait in 1944

insisting "this isn't dangerous, it's exciting".

"Still", recalled Berryman, "I think if we had known earlier some of us may not have volunteered. There were definitely times we thought, what the Hell are we doing here? We're getting five bob a day for this?"

The two-week voyage though Japanese-occupied waters was uncomfortable: inside *Krait* "was as bare as a baby's bottom", most space was taken up by fuel drums, they flew the Japanese flag and, posing as Malay fishermen, they wore sarongs and constantly applied foul-smelling brown dye to their skin. Berryman spent much time at the top of the mast with binoculars looking out for other craft, which would be given a wide berth. When, occasionally, a Japanese float plane flew over, members of Z Force would wave and stand in a circle pretending to unpick fishing lines.

Back row, left to right:
AB Walter Falls; A/L Seaman Kevin Cain; Major Ivan Lyon;
Lieutenant Hubert Carse; and Leading Stoker James McDowell.
Front row,
AB Andrew Huston; AB Mostyn Berryman; and L/ Tel Horace Young.

On 18 September, *Krait* arrived off Singapore, which was ablaze with lights and where the Japanese thought themselves safe, and offloaded six commandos in three two-man canoes. Much to their disappointment, Berryman and Marsh were told to stay behind. "Of course, we put on a bit of a turn, 'We've done all the training, sir, why can't we be in it?' And he said, 'Nope, you two are going to be baby sitters and look after *Krait*' ". The canoeists established a base in a cave on a small island, and the night of September 26, paddled into the harbour to attach limpet mines to seven vessels, sinking or damaging 37,000 tons of shipping. Meanwhile, ***Krait*** loitered at sea for two weeks, until going to a rendezvous at the island of Pompong, 50 miles off Singapore, on the night of October 1-2, when only one canoe was found. Lyon had told ***Krait*** to leave that night no matter what, but "being good old Australians, we decided we'd break the law and go back in two nights later", when the other two canoes were recovered.

On the return voyage, a few minutes to midnight on October 11, a Japanese patrol boat intercepted *Krait* in the Lombok Strait. As Berryman crouched low with his Bren gun trained on the warship, Lyon, who had packed *Krait's* bows with high explosive, prepared a suicide ramming which would have destroyed both vessels, but, after the longest 15 minutes of Berryman's life, the warship drew away without switching on a searchlight or hailing ***Krait***: "It was pure luck".

Krait entered Exmouth Bay after a 48-day mission. Berryman was mentioned in dispatches for gallantry, skill and devotion to duty in a hazardous enterprise.

When later in 1943 Lyon asked Berryman whether he would care to return to Singapore as part of a larger, repeat operation, he carefully considered the proposal for two seconds before declining. On this second, ***Operation, Rimau***, all were killed in action or executed by the Japanese. Instead Berryman completed his war service in the destroyer *HMAS Vendetta* , and was demobbed in February 1946.

Mostyn Berryman was born at Kent Town, South Australia, and brought up a Methodist: his father had fought as a teenaged signaller in the Australia Imperial Force on the Western Front in the First World War.

Postwar he returned to the stockbrokers S C Ward & Co, where he had been a clerk, and remained there until retirement 46 years later.

Berryman was aboard *Krait* when she entered Sydney in 1964 to become a museum ship, and in 1993, on the 50th anniversary of ***Operation Jaywick***, he met Lyon's son, "the spitting image of his father" at Kranji War Cemetery. Lyon's French wife, Gabrielle Bouvier, and their baby son had spent the war in Japanese internment camps, and together Berryman and the son cried that the son had never met his heroic father.

For many years he was owed the five-bob-a-day danger money which he had been promised, and which when the government did pay, was topped up to A$5,000.

Operation Jaywick, one of the most successful clandestine raids in Australian history, left a bitter aftermath. Lyon had intended that ***Jaywick*** be publicised to rattle the Japanese and boost Allied morale, but senior commanders decided against this as they wished to conduct similar raids in the future. Not having the slightest idea of how the attack had been mounted, the Japanese inflicted savage reprisals on Singaporeans, who they suspected of aiding the attack. "Sometimes", a troubled Berryman mused in later life, "I feel that we shouldn't have done it because they murdered untold number of people trying to find out who did."

He married his childhood sweetheart, Mary Cant, who predeceased him in 2018, and he is survived by their four daughters.

Mostyn Berryman, born November 9, 1923, died August 6, 2020.

BACK IN 1956 Part 19

By Lt. Cdr. E. H. Chittleburgh

THE QUARTERDECK DIVISION

Our introduction to the Quarterdeck was indeed a chilly one. Those of us who had already joined the ship for a period of sea trials, were familiar with snow, wind and ice, and the general discomfort that these elements cause. After commissioning on 14th February 1956, we began a general tidy up, having been in dockyard hands for some months; when we finally moved out to Folly Point the ditching ceremony began. On these occasions the sailor gleefully hurls over side dirt, bits of metal, odd nuts and bolts, wood, boxes and, of course, the occasional ship's fitting inevitably joins the unwanted gash. The ship, by now, was more or less squared off and the Quarterdeck was standing by for the next upheaval in the shape of 'Ammunition Ship'. Ammunition was very quickly completed. Little did we realise at the moment that 'humping in' stores, soldiers, kit bags and provisions at high speed, was to become a feature of the commission.

After a very brief call at Plymouth we set off for the Mediterranean in comparatively smooth weather. The passage was enlivened, from time to time, with Evening Quarters during which we all learned where our various bits of gear were stowed; further, we were able to arrange it in its correct position on deck. We were thus engaged when we were ordered to Malta at high speed.

We had expected to work up in Malta over a period of a month, however, we saw Grand Harbour for five hours. Our bows were then pointed East; the Quarterdeck stripped bare, and at 26 knots made our way to Port Said in rather uncomfortable weather. The Canal was passed in fine weather and it was good to get into whites and strong sunshine in the Red Sea. On reaching Aden the Quartedeckmen were mostly a bright salmon pink but a week later this had become a handsome bronze. From Aden onwards the Quarterdeck became a parade ground. Platoons from various departments were leaving hoof marks on our off-white deck, but, on the other hand, the ship's Company were becoming familiar with weapons and webbing and even learned to look a little like soldiers during certain parts of the day.

Bahrein proved to be our destination and it was here, we of the Quarterdeck, started to sort out our canvas gear. During the subsequent short cruise to the Persian Gulf the Ceremonial Awning and associated bunting went up and down like a yo-yo. Apart from that the visits to the Gulf ports gave us an insight into oil wells, drilling rigs, refineries, tank farms and commercial oil.

Our next move was to Colombo and a visit to the dry dock and an easy routine to give us as much leave as possible; a few days later we were in Trincomalee. At Trinco we had our third tussle with wires from buoys but at this stage we were quite adept at this operation except when the Foc'sle attempted to lengthen the ship by the stretching method. Later that evening we saw a grim-faced, tight-lipped staff officer disappear down the Quarterdeck hatch: it meant little that night but next morning we were storing ship for the Gulf again. This work continued through the day until 22.30 when the Commander offered all hands a beer, hastening to add they would have to pay for it themselves. This visit to Bahrein was brief and we soon returned to Trinco were we spent our time preparing for East Africa, our one and only Flagship cruise. Having reached latitude zero we noticed that when King Neptune arrived onboard he gave our friends on the Foc'sle a couple of 1 1/4lb. 'blasts'; could it be that he was dissatisfied with that part of the ship? Later he moved aft and held his court upon the Quarterdeck!

It was about this time the Division was to lose P.O. Marjoram, who had done all the early work, and we welcomed P.O. Reynolds to continue to guide some of his Junior Seamen who had been rated up.

J.E.T followed and we made friends with the Navies of Ceylon, India and Pakistan. We found that they had respect and affection for the Royal Navy and that their sense of sportsmanship and good fun at any game was splendid. We also remember their boarding parties during the C-in-C's evolutions, either by accident or design, they were repelled with hoses and physical effort; most of them ended up in the sea.

J.E.T. was over and we prepared another Flagship cruise but the Suez situation interfered and, once again, we sailed with the Quarterdeck piled high with stores, this could only mean Bahrein.

Some days later we picked up two companies of the 1st Gloucester Regiment, who used our Quarterdeck for drill and weapon training and in the evenings it became a playing filed with some splendid tugs-of-war and deck hockey and cricket.

Our final thought may perhaps be this, we have never had a 'Tiddly' Quarterdeck but we have had a working quarterdeck where Tiddliness, sport and soldiers have all kept their place, and we have learned to tolerate SOOT.

ANOTHER DOOR Part 2: Our Journey to Disaster

by Tom Simkins MBE

We duly tied up at the Pladjoe wharf the following morning, while the Japanese were having another go at the RAF airfield. Several flights went over that morning but none was interested in shipping - just the airfield. We wondered from where they could be operating.

Shortly after arriving, three shiploads of RAF and RA troops arrived from Singapore. They had been bombed on route; they had made it, but with many casualties. They had been attacked twice, once 50 miles south of Singapore in the Ehio Straits and again near the mouth of the Palembang River. A ship that had passed us the previous day, going out, the "Juno", came limping back. She too had caught it upon reaching the river mouth. I had heard her "AAA" signals but had not caught the name.

I have dealt with events described above in detail in order to convey how slowly, then at a quickening pace, the situation worsened from peacefully enjoyed existence, from songs of welcome and farewell from the islands, to the state now when we were virtually being hemmed in with problems.

It was fortunate for the crew they were not aware of information that the Captain and I had shared as to the deteriorating situation. The knowledge that we had gleaned from ships arriving, and from some of the RAF personnel, made them particularly happy that instead of Singapore the ' Pinna' was now going in the opposite direction - to Australia.

The news from the BBC the next day was to the effect that last night all our troops had evacuated the mainland of Malaya and were now on the island and preparing for the defence of Singapore proper. The thought did cross my mind that we could be involved in the evacuation of Singapore, but I dismissed it as being just too preposterous. Singapore could not fall. .. It was too British!

There was further news that the causeway linking the island to the mainland had been blown-up, and I wondered just how much difference it would make to the extremely efficient Japanese campaign which had brought than so quickly down the Malay Peninsula.

Arthur Green and I spent the morning at Pladjoe swimming club where we stayed for a very large hot curry. Except for a few bangs that came from somewhere, we could have been on holiday. Some of the chaps that I met expressed their opinions that everything coming in and out of Singapore was being attacked in the Rhio Straits area, and I wondered why so persistently Rhio? In the afternoon, I accompanied the old man to the Naval Control. I do not know which bit of bad news should have come first, but anyway, the first was, that we were now

to return north to Singapore taking with us 19000 tins of petrol that had just been loaded for the RAF base at Darwin. There, pick-up some special oil cargo that we were to have picked-up at Balik, had that port still been open to us, and then return south to Darwin via Banka and Sunda straits!

The second bit of news, delivered very much as matter-of-fact information, was that the Japanese were making regular aircraft attacks on shipping arriving at the river mouth after having left Palembang to catch the morning tide (it was at the river mouth that the "Juno" was attacked before she limped back to Pladjoe).

Walking back to the ship the old man was quiet for quite a time and then he said, 'You know Sparks' (he always called me that, but when I was not around he would perhaps say to someone within ear shot 'where is that sparking bugger' this was because an Aborigine pointing at me had once said "Hey im fella sparking bugger, what im do?") 'I have spent so many years out here among the islands and I could hang up my jacket on any one of them, but I have never felt so far from home as I do at this moment'

Although I recorded those words and the prevailing circumstances in my diary written at the time and from which I am now able to quote, I have no idea whether or not I replied to his remark. But what could I have said? If I had voiced any private thoughts, then they must surely have been the obvious ones. The old man had every reason to feel far from home, for, if we can believe that 'coming events do cast a shadow before', his spoken words in reality were to take him even further away from home - as a prisoner of war in a Japanese hospital.

At dinner that night the topic of conversation was the obvious one. Who on earth could have conjured-up such mad instructions? It could only have been somebody so far away and out of touch with the real local critical situation as to risk a valuable ship and an equally valuable cargo not to mention the crew, in such a way.

It is interesting to conjecture on life's patterns and how things fit together. Could events really be pre-ordained? On February 9th, 150 carrier born Japanese Naval Aircraft attacked Darwin, killing 240 people and injuring many more. Eleven transport ships, a destroyer, and a number of merchant ships all sunk or disabled. If we had gone south, and not north to Singapore, we would have been in Darwin, that is assuming that we had not bumped into the Japanese Naval task force on the way there!

Interestingly enough, as we moved out onto the promenade deck after dinner with a bottle of brandy which had been saved for such an occasion as this, the subject was closed. There was no reference to the situation that surely must have been foremost in everyone's mind. By this time we had moved off from the wharf to our moorings downstream again in anticipation of our departure, and the pilot joining us the next morning. According to the notes I made at the

time,.'... *The river was placid although flowing quite rapidly; bringing with it large bunches of wild hyacinths that looked like small floating gardens. The sunset had been beautiful, leaving behind it, for a lingering 10 minutes, a golden, then deep red to purple hue, making the whole landscape of trees, huts and mirror reflections near the river bank where the water was still, look quite unreal ...*' (Sunsets are rapid near the equator).'

... Later the near full moon was rising, but still quite low in the sky and looking like a large yellow-red paw-paw resting itself on top of the trees, and in the water, a long avenue of yellow juice. It seemed that we could be blissfully enjoying our surroundings with the war a long way off just as we had done six weeks before.

The following morning dawned in the same way as it had done on previous mornings heralded by the first muted sounds from the jungle; it filled the sky with purple, turning to pink. And then shafts of golden light elbowed their way through the trees. They then skated across the river this morning to meet the pilot launch head-on as it chugged its way from Palambang pushing a white moustached bow wave ahead of it...

With the pilot on board and pleasantries exchanged we duly weighed anchor and left the mooring for our several hours journey to the river mouth. It is just possible they were a bit slow in getting there which was fortunate for us, but not for the "Katong" that had left before us or perhaps had stayed the night down river. With a cargo of volatile explosives stored she had received preferential treatment from Japanese aircraft, and it gave us our first sight of what war looked like. Survivors where being picked up by a BI. ship, the 'Delaware' This was for real, it was awful..... I could not believe my eyes. I just couldn't believe it. Didn't want to believe it...

Half an hour later we were well and truly stuck on a mud-bank. The pilot who had so successfully beached us was all for leaving us with the promise of returning in time for the next tide. He had obviously not liked the sight of the ship going up when he was normally used to ships going forward or astern. It must have put him off his navigational stroke and hence our present predicament.

However the old man would not accept that arrangement and made him stay on board. For he said "If that little man has friends up there then he can sit on this boat load of petrol and give them a wave when they come back'

I thought it rather a shame for the pilot was a nice little man (a Malay) and he was obviously very disturbed. I think the old man was too, for he was normally a placid and understanding person, always friendly and he never pulled 'captain' on us. In fact, quite the reverse. Whenever he went ashore - that was usually the only tine he put on his uniform cap - he would

frequently invite one of his officers to accompany him. Unlike one captain I once sailed with; he always put his cap on when he spoke to any of his crew, at any time.

I offered the suggestion that I could get a coded message off on short wave which would be safe but the captain declined saying that the tide would get us floating before a tug could possibly arrive from Palembang.

From my diary. *'...We sweated it out for the rest of the day, not only with apprehension, but also in the sizzling heat our position wasn't very far south of the equator. Unlike up-river there was just not the slightest breeze or movement of air at all. By lunchtime the ship was one great big iron oven. Numerous distant birds were mistaken for approaching aircraft such was the prevailing anticipation. But on thinking, what help could early warning of approaching aircraft be to us anyway? We could not fight back, and there was no air-raid shelter to run to ...'*

We duly lifted off the sandbank with the rising tide. Later as the ladder was dropped over the side and the pilot descended into his launch, the old man waved jovially and said jokingly, 'Tell them we couldn't wait' and he pointed skyward. The pilot smiled, waved, and gave a victory 'V' sign.

The next morning, as the sun rose above the horizon and was quickly delivering increasing heat, we were well on our way north to Singapore. There was not a cloud in the sky to take advantage of the mirror-like quality of the sea.

As we pressed on up the coast of Sumatra, the voyage was uneventful. A lot of tension had disappeared as though having avoided anticipated aggro whilst on the mud-bank, and after, we had left trouble behind and a relaxed atmosphere prevailed. I say relaxed collectively, but not so for me. I had been keeping continuous watch from each daybreak and there had been numerous ships sending out their "*AAA*" signals, sometimes, Singapore repeating them only to be interrupted by further "*AAA*" signals. Sometimes a ship's position was included, sometimes chopped-off. The positions that I was able to log were generally north from our position. Shortly after lunch I could hear the *'Madura*" sending out *AAA's* and saying that she was being bombed, and then on top of those signals, the *'Lochranza'* which I lost because of interference from Singapore radio repeating the *'Madura's'* message with its more powerful signal. Later the *'Siperok'* and then shortly afterwards the *'Subidar'* giving her position which was in the region of one degree north. (She was lost later in the Banka Strait on February 13th) I checked our position chit on my desk, probably half-an-hour old ... A quick calculation - could that mean the "*Subidar'* was 10 or 15 miles away? - Two or three minutes away, perhaps less?

I rang the bridge and reported the message and position and continued listening and conjecturing. I was still engrossed in my conjecturing thoughts, with my ears listening to the

Singapore radio calling the *'Siperok"* and asking her to repeat her message, when suddenly," Brr Brr Brr' of the bridge telephone. It was the old man.

'Standby Sparks' and he rang-off. I started up the main transmitter generator and waited - still conjecturing, but now doing so worryingly. I felt the ship tremble and then lean over as I watched the curtains on either side of the porthole over my operating table begin to move out in sympathy. Still standing-by as I was instructed, I stood up. Looking through the aft-looking porthole, I could see the foaming wake of the tight turn that we were making and then, through the porthole over my desk, I just caught sight and a glimpse of a naval vessel before it disappeared from view, probably a mile away.

A Japanese? - It had not been visible long enough for confirmation but then the 'stand-by' instruction was doing so in my head for a few seconds of uncertainty. I was tempted to send the 'RRR' signals thinking, I suppose, that I might not get another chance, for my subconscious vision still had the last WBA message in its store, with its ominous portend, through that same porthole. But the old man had only said "Stand-by'. And then Brr Brr Brr Brr again ... "Send it Sparks'. I still had the navel vessel in mind, so I said, 'Send what?'

The old man snapped back 'Aircraft'. I had just tapped out my 'AAA' signal and was halfway through the ship's position when it seemed that the whole radio room shook. Documents, books and bottles of ink launched themselves out into the room, and over my desk, and the draught caused by the radio room door slamming closed blew all the papers out of the basket and round about.

As I continued with my transmission, I could sense that there was something wrong. There was but I didn't know until later that the large output valve in the transmitter had broken.

As I started up the emergency transmitter and adjusted the aerial switch, I could hear engine noises and what seemed to be gunfire. Then another explosion as gallons of water sloshed through and over my operating desk, washing away everything on it. As I attempted to continue with my message, I realised again that there was still something that changing the aerials over again would not rectify.

Out on deck, I squinted up into the brightness of the sky and through voluminous clouds of thick black smoke to locate the aerials. In the far distance there were aircraft in a tight turn to starboard, and in the near distance, both aerials were down and lying across the bridge structure and the radio room. One end of the emergency aerial was still attached to the funnel amidships. There were angry flames and black smoke, lots of the latter driving horizontally down the deck due to our forward speed.

Dropping down into the for'd well deck, I managed to find the end of the emergency aerial - it still had its lanyard and insulator attached - and eventually managed to reinstate and secure it.

Not knowing what the future had in store for us, whether it was more bombs or a gunning run, or both, I was anxious to be anywhere other than where I was. The homing pigeon part of me wanted to get back in my "safe" radio room, while the ostrich in me was prepared to get underneath a newspaper or in a gunny sack, whichever came first! Climbing down to the deck it was impossible to see if the aerial downlead was clear because of the thick smoke that was being blown aft. For'd, it was an inferno of fire. Descending from the top of the radio room after freeing it, I could hear the telephone brr-brr-ing. I remember saying to myself, "Hell, not again'. The old man said 'That you Sparks'. I said, 'Yes' (wondering who he thought it might be). 'Report bombed and on fire ...'

I then noticed that I had left both the transmitters running and their generators were whining away. I switched off the main, and tuned-up the emergency transmitter to suit the changed aerial conditions, and sent off the "AAA' signals again, this time successfully, and adding the Captain's last instructions.

Singapore radio (call-sign VPS at that time) came back immediately with, ' What ship' in plain language and not "QRA?" I had of course given him the ship's name but in my hurry I may have scrambled it a bit, so I repeated *'Pinna'*.

Before I could receive his receipt, the "*Lockranza*" came on giving 37' N 104° 14' E, saying that she was beaching on Abang Island, Rhio Strait.

There were two more signals mixed up together which I couldn't read because of the noise that was going on. I wondered what was going on outside on deck, and how many more attacks there might be. I called up VPS again giving him "QSL?" He replied confirming that he had received my query, with "QSL" "R" and then carried on with other ships. He was having a busy tine. I was desperately trying to deal with the log book I had retrieved from the pool of water on the deck, and having difficulties with the indelible blue pencil marks that were running down the page, when "Brrr-Brrr" The old man said, "did you get the message away?' Before I could answer he said 'they're here again'.

I sent off another string of 'AAA's and waited for acknowledgement. VPS came back 'Repeat position and condition' I did and added, "Attack in progress'. It was the old man's last remark that made me initiate it. It was during the interchange of signals I had to give 'wait' while I dashed across to the door and closed it, because I couldn't breathe for all the smoke that was rolling in. I hardly had time to get back again when there was the "brr-brr" again.

The old man said, 'It's OK. They've gone', then 'did you get the messages away?' I said 'Yes''. 'Did they get them?' I said 'Yes' again. "Well, tell them bombed and on fire, and we need some bloody help" I called VPS again and gave the Captain's message, (modified) VPS came back "QRU' (I have nothing for you).

"Brr-Brr" again, 'You alright down there Sparks?' I said I was but I wasn't sure. All in one piece, yes, but when someone has been dropping bombs on you, a situation so alien to one's normal peaceful life ... well ....

I wasn't surprised at VPS's 'QRU". I had heard other ships asking for help and getting the same reply, or, as in one case, 'no help available'. I stood up, closed the portholes and put the deadlights over them - after the horse had left the stable - and switched on the lights. If I could have experienced what people in London and other cities had done, during Hitler's blitz I might have thought I had got off very lightly, and taken the incident in my stride. Instead, I felt distinctly unhappy ... unhappiness too is relative.

As you can guess, during the period described above, I was not sitting there writing up my diary as events occurred from which I am now able to repeat here. My diary ended in Palembang and was not resumed until I had time on my hands later hence my ability to describe events and names which I would have otherwise forgotten (albeit that there may be errors).

Contrasting with the quiet normality of the radio room, with the *'Pinna'* gently lolling in the sea-swell - engines stopped; out on deck there was chaos, the smell of explosion and burning. There was the angry noise of the flames plus lots of smoke and squirting water everywhere as Watts, the mate, (he always insisted he was that and not chief officer) urging the surviving deck crew to point their hoses in the right direction and to stop looking up.

The old man poked his head round the radio room door and indicated that I should leave my post and give a hand on deck, for he said "You will be more use out there than you can in here'. He said that the bombs had also dropped right into the crew accommodation for'd, just fatefully timed as a number of the crew had gone in there to join others there off watch. He said that he thought there must be at least twenty dead in addition to injured ones outside. Pointing to the water on the deck he said, 'Where did that come from?' (I wonder where he might have thought it did come from?) I explained that I had only just closed the starboard porthole and he enlarged on that by describing how the same near miss had flooded the port side of the bridge too. He added that the RNVR boat (the one that I had seen through my porthole) had been attacked first etc , . . . He didn't know if it had any defensive armament but there certainly wasn't any retaliatory shooting on our behalf.

I thought it very surprising that it should disappear so smartly, leaving us alone with our problems. Not only could we be seen to be on fire, but also our radioed message for help could not have been missed at one-mile range!

In my diary I wrote 'it was mid-afternoon when we were attacked, but by sunset, things were getting under control, although the fires were still burning. I noticed how the flat calm sea was reflecting a beautiful sunset ..."

'Everyone had worked so hard trying to get crew members out of the wreckage and sorting out the dead from the injured, despite the heat, smoke and the threat of further combustion from our volatile cargo. Arthur Greene and Sniffy Wilson (third and fourth engineers) worked like beavers on the wounded, some so badly injured or burned as to be almost unrecognisable. One of, the engine room crew was only recognisable because of his bowlegs. Many were not, they had just been blown apart and pieces scattered about or lost in the fire.

There was so much to be done ... I worked mechanically ... there was so much disorder ... there seemed to be two of me, the other one leaning on the rail and watching the sunset, as I had done so many evenings before.

Up to that time I had lived a very unsophisticated life, and except for a minor problem with a rickshaw coolie in Singapore, a very peaceful one. Bombings, muggings and terrorists were commonplace news items of the future. There had not been any TV in my life depicting such violence that could have prepared me for that day's experience. I remember feeling very miserable, not so much because of the trouble around me, but I think, because of the bottled-up feelings of fear inside me that hadn't had the opportunity to get out - fear that anticipates the worst that could have happened, but didn't.

One of the crew, a Chinese, who had not seemed badly hurt at first had the back of his knee sticking out at the front and whatever had done it had also taken his trouser leg through it too. There wasn't any bleeding but he was in great pain. He died a short time later, perhaps from an undetected internal wound, or perhaps just fatalistically giving up - who knows? He had been moved away and laid outside the bathroom door all night and the next morning I had to step over him so many times. I recall this minor incident from amongst the greater ones, because his half-open eyes seemed to stare at me so accusingly, making me feel guilty that I had survived. Others far more seriously ill were still alive next morning.

'... In our dirty state we were served with a scratch meal on deck of tea and sandwiches just around dusk. The sandwiches that were not eaten were so very conspicuous by their presence on the cargo hatch top that had remained intact so preventing flames reaching the volatile cargo beneath it.

The fire had been controlled but was still giving off acrid fumes and smoke. In the dimming light, the bare skeleton framework stood out in silhouette very grimly amongst the debris. There were still charred remains ... Nobody was hungry ..."

We were all wet and filthy and it was concerning to see how the cheerful faces I knew could change into such looks of gravity and haggard lines appear so rapidly. By this time I felt ashamed of myself for actually feeling cheerful when I should have been unhappy because of such death and suffering around me. I suppose it was because of my feeling of sheer relief that I had come through the attack unscathed, for which I had experienced so much worrying anticipation. Had the bombs dropped more amidships and hence through the bridge structure and into the volatile cargo, it could have been catastrophic.

I really was tired. I had hardly slept since leaving the Palembang anchorage and had more or less kept a continuous radio-watch on the shipping bands, and also on Rugby radio, just in case there could be a broadcast message that might affect our situation… There had not been. I could just as well have enjoyed my regulation rest periods.

Twice during my on-deck activities, the old man suggested that I call Singapore "'for" he said initially, "you might as well use that bloody radio of yours, that's what it's there for… the Japanese know we are here anyway… check if there is a message for us"

Although the fire was now under control, I think that the old man was still harbouring the worry that the fire might still break through and into the for'd cargo hatch, in which case, it certainly would be 'abandon ship'.

I had called VPS each time, and as expected, the reply was the same – 'nil'. ("Sorry nil" might have helped a little).

Eventually a certain quietness prevailed. Crewmembers' whose job it was to be on duty were; others had turned in leaving a few watchers over the still smouldering 'sharp-end'. The only sign of life amid ships was Sniffy Wilson wandering about.

I went along the deck for a shower and tripped over the body outside the door, and automatically said 'sorry'. Back in the radio room it was hot and stuffy and it reeked of trapped smoke, and occupying my settee was a casualty. So as not to disturb him I put the phones through the aft-looking port then went out on deck, then with them round my neck, I leaned on the rail. There was no need to put them on, for the static noise, as to be expected, was deafening.

I was letting my thoughts wander as I looked out across the calm still sea. They were not about the day's activities, but far ahead to our arrival in Singapore and would repairs to the ship be possible, and about our return voyage, when Sniffy joined me. A lot of reaction had set in and he was now experiencing the trauma of his afternoon and evening work on the wounded.

'Behind us the gentle roll of the ship caused moon-inspired shadows to wander across the deck and up the vertical side of the bridge structure. For'd beyond the smouldering wreckage, the sea sparkled in bright moonlight, and in the far distance, against a backcloth of starlit sky - the nearest of the Rhio islands.'

We talked for a while until he felt more relaxed and then I went to my cabin. I didn't feel like sharing it with another casualty who was in there - all the for'd crew-accommodation having been destroyed - so I went into the saloon and stretched out there. But sleep would not come. Sniffy's melancholia had wiped off on me. I tried to think back to happier times - there were so many but it didn't work. Sleep still would not come. Instead my thoughts kept drifting back to the past few hours on deck, and ahead to an uncertain future. There was no escape in dreams. After half-an-hour I arose and went on deck, and then decided to listen out on the HF bands which would be free of static. Out on deck again, Sniffy was still there where I had left him. He asked if I had any aspirin. I had, and he eventually disappeared.

Back in the radio room later, the casualty had gone, understandably so it was baking hot, the steel structure having soaked up all the day's heat was now behaving like a huge night storage heater. I had just switched back to 500 kc/s when the old man put his head round the door. He said, "Why don't you get some rest Sparks, you can't do any good with that bloody row going on' (actually it was my official on-watch period).

I agreed. He intimated that we would be moving off in three hours or so and that he would like me on watch then – noise or no noise.

After he departed, I went aft to my cabin collected a pillow switched on the electric fan in the radio room and lay down on the settee, I began to think about the aerials and my report to the Marconi Company office…. then there was the ding-dong of the bridge telegraph the brr-ding initiated by the engine room in reply and then the steady vibration of our engine .It was nearly midnight …I'd been asleep for three hours. So ended February 3rd 1942. The day my war broke out.

By the next morning, as I went into breakfast we were well north of the Rhio strait and a half a day's run from Singapore and our destination at the Pulau Bukum oil installation. In the bright morning light the scene on the deck for'd was one of disorder but by noon there was a bit less of it, but still the confusion of metal at the sharp end and bodies of crew. It was sad to see some of them being lowered over the side. I don't know what sort of burial procedure the Chinese religion would have demanded but under the circumstances and with a temperature of over 100° F the mate, Watts and Shorty Armstrong the cadet were solving the problem in the only practical way

I watched one go over the side, stiff as a poker and looking like a revolving "X" and then a large splash. Shorty was only 17. He had worked hard the day before and now here he was helping with the dead and with a smile on his face as I passed.

The mate, a quite person who seldom raised his voice or swore was saying what sounded like "that's it Shorty the Gentlemen ashore can deal with the mess in the foc'sle". I learned later he too had been on watch all night and had his breakfast out of a glass.

Beyond the north end of the Rhio archipelago and the beginning of the wartime southern approach to Singapore, the boarding officer came on board off his launch. He told the captain that he would have to anchor because the port of Singapore was closed, and if we proceeded we were likely to be fired upon. He was terribly jumpy and very anxious to leave us - I suppose he didn't want to be on board such a prime target with aircraft flying about. There was no "wee tot' in the Captain's cabin this time; he was on board and off again inside five minutes. He said that he was surprised to see us ... he hadn't been informed ... etc.

Presumably, whoever it was who had not informed him, must have thought that we had not survived yesterday 's aggro .The old man carried on, ignoring the order to anchor. If it had been possible to lower the anchor, we would not have been able to raise it again since all the steam pipes and winches had been destroyed. To be fired upon if we proceeded seemed to be a minor hazard. The old man told the 3rd mate Sandy, to hoist identity flags, and me to keep a good listen-out (as if I needed telling) and to go up on the bridge if the phone rang. He was obviously anticipating Aldis lamp signals.

As we approached with Pulau Samboe appearing on our port bow, things didn't look at all good. There was a low dark smoke cloud over Singapore in the distance, with columns of smoke looking like black waterspouts. By this time, February 4th, the Japanese were in Johore, and facing our troops across the demolished causeway (narrow passage between Singapore and the 'Mainland) prior to a grand assault on the island, but of course, we did not know that at the time.

It was 1.30 p.m. and I had just returned from the bridge, having deposited the code books for safe keeping in the captains safe. Two or three of us were chatting on deck; I had the phones hanging round my neck as I sat on the radio room door coaming. There was no way I could not hear VPS'S loud signals, or the telephone bell from the bridge. There had been a continuous drone of aircraft engines for some time but we had not been concerned about them, thinking (mistakenly) that they were RAF since we were now in home waters. Every now and then isolated aircraft approached overhead, flying in and out of the cloud.

The mate, John Watts had been expounding again on the wisdom of staying on board when we tied up at Bukom Island and not to cross to Singapore because of the frequent air-raids on he city. Just before going up on to the bridge, he had been saying that he could not face going

near the sharp end again, it was too sickening, he would let the shore people deal with the remains. The latest count had been eighteen dead, not by count but by their absence on the bridge or below. Some of the aircraft that we had seen began to assemble in to threes They looked like silver birds in the sky, and as we looked up we agreed that they were Lockheed Hudson's by their twin engines and twin tail fins. I popped into the radio room and collected my binoculars and handed them to Arthur who was looking skyward. I don't know if he used them, but seconds later he said "Bloody Hell, they're Japanese"

By then I could see that they had lined up in the distance and were making steep dives towards us. I shot into the radio room to start the transmitter (which was quite unnecessary in view of the ship's position) Sandy and Arthur falling in after me. By this time machine gun bullets were spatting and twanging all over the place.

I had just sat down and bent over my desk when life became a bit confused yet without taking in the explosion, which seemed seconds later. The room blacked out I thought it was my eyes but it was because the door had blown closed with the explosion and the only light available was that getting through the bullet holes. I fumbled to find the emergency lighting and shouted out (as if it would help the situation) 'For God's stop that fan' A bullet must have gone through it and it was going clankerty clank etc. Arthur moved and switched it off and at the same time hurled himself on me in a kind of rugby tackle and shouted

'Hell Sparky, get down' right in my ear which sounded louder that the bomb. He proceeded to hug me in bear-like grip-then it happened again with eye gripping pain and shaking bulkhead. I was about to speak to Arthur when it happened again. This time the deck shot up hitting me in the middle against his pressing weight. The bulkhead hurled inwards throwing the MF transmitter on to my desk where I would have been leaning except for Arthur's rugby tackle, and the HF transmitter to lean out, defying gravity.

We eventually got up from the deck, and Sandy from the settee as though we had first-hand information that it was not going to happen again, but it was the sound of a hundred blowlamps or an express train hurling down the alleyway - on the other side of the door and the increasing black smoke that was driving in through the burst bulkhead making breathing difficult, that demanded instant attention.

I leaned on the MF transmitted feeling a bit surprised that I was all in one piece. I wrote later... 'Dense foul tasting black smoke was billowing into the room through the burst bulkhead nearly cancelling what bit of light that had been getting in through the bullet holes making it increasingly difficult to see and breath. In the darkness I could just see a shape at the door which turned out to be Arthur, he was trying to open the door without success. He shouted 'the door's jammed . . .give me a push....you ok Sparky?'

I shook off my temporary immobility to join him and fell over my up-turned chair en route. In my mind's eye I can still see a still-frame picture of the three of us (two up and one down) smoke all around, and Sandy coughing loudly. I am sure that I speak for all of us when I say that in that short time we realised the seriousness of our situation.... and that our time was running out fast, emphasised by the noise outside and the heat and smoke inside.

As I realised the gravity of our situation imprisoned as we were, a thought, a vision, an echo of words, albeit only of a few seconds duration assailed my consciousness so vividly as to cut me off from reality. It dug itself out of my subconscious memory store where it had been locked up for twenty years or so and presented itself.

The family had just moved into the chip-shop, so it must have been around 1920-1922. I don't know where it came from but I had discovered quite a lot of old (then) cinematograph film, looking very much like the present day perforated 35mm camera film except, being that date, it was highly inflammable.

I had discovered, that by rolling up a strip of film in a piece of paper, resembling a cigarette shape, lighting one end, and then blowing out the flame, the device then continued to smoulder furiously, spurting out thick smelly black smoke at the other end. It made the ideal stink bomb. Alfie and I got up to quite a bit of mischief dropping our stink bombs through letterboxes, or in a shop, and then running. When my parents got to know about it, after complaints from irate customers, I was very much in the doghouse.

I must have been very much hooked on this stink-bomb activity, for some time later I was still at it when I was caught by my very angry mother. I had caught some flies and had put them into a bottle and followed that, by inserting a stink bomb before corking it up - just as she arrived. She was furious, and lost for the appropriate words to suit the occasion, she concluded "and perhaps one of these days you will be trapped like that and it will teach you a lesson …." Probably those very words. She obviously didn't really mean what she had said, but used those words in a way that would best sink into my head to suit the occasion. I don't recall even thinking or remembering about the incident in all the years that followed. I might never have remembered the occasion ever again, had it not popped out to grin at me in that smoke filled room

Joining Arthur and Sandy at the door, it didn't require any confirmation from me that it wouldn't open, despite our many repeated combined efforts. Stepping back from them, I stumbled over my chair again, which, gave me the thought of using it on the door, then that effort triggered off another one that had been slow in arriving. I'd known that there was something, but my brain was still sluggish the explosions and good thoughts were not forthcoming - then. That was it ... The iron bar.

I had used it during yesterday's activities on deck, and on coming into the radio room, perhaps to satisfy the captain's request concerning the radio message, I had dropped it down - somewhere, but now, my brain knew exactly where it was to an inch.

With adrenaline assisted swipes soon the door was partly open and sagging on one hinge. It opened outwards, and so great was the pressure due to the chimney effect down the alleyway that Arthur had difficulty in pushing the door against it, and opening it enough for us to get through.

Although I have forgotten so many things and occurrences of that time, which I have also regrettably omitted from my diary, I do remember that treacly black smoke, mixed with orange flames hurtling down the alleyway and past the door.

Well once more, another door had opened, even though it was a squeeze to get through this one! It seemed that the only way to go where the fire was not, was aft, so I followed Arthur who was putting on his best speed down the prom' deck. I didn't see in which direction. Sandy went although I found out later.

Three quarters of the way aft, I remembered my skin-out bag. This was an expression that young Shorty had used when describing the small-bag-cum-satchel that I always kept by me, containing important items like my diary, PMG certificate, some cash in different currencies and a few other important items suitably water-proofed. I also had a second less important duffel bag that I kept in my cabin aft. It was touch and go as to whether or not I would get back into the radio room, but the partly opened door fortunately helped as a screen. Inside the room seemed now pitch black and the thick smoke was being sucked out of the door. I didn't need any light. I knew exactly where the bag was hanging, grabbed it, and shot out again and down the deck.

Getting to the end of the promenade deck, I could see down into the aft well-deck, and Arthur and someone, who later turned out to be Noel, the 2nd engineer, were down there on the starboard side, although I didn't know why they were there then. Being outside my cabin, I decided to go in and get my other bag that contained a few extra sensible Boy-Scout-be-prepared things.

It is plain that I just wasn't ticking on all cylinders, for there I was thinking of extra luggage and I didn't even know at that time how I was going to get off the ship! With one leg halfway in the cabin, I remembered that the bag was not in there. Because of the injured man in my room my boy that morning had taken it into the radio room. So I hotfooted back again.

It is at this stage I seem to alternate between clear and dim thinking. I still had a problem. I remember getting near to the radio room and finding that the flames had driven right past it. Also at some time or other, going or returning, taking a dive behind the cover of a deck pump

because I heard engines and I anticipated more gunning. Then attempting to get up and having a terrific pain in my middle presumably due to the deck hitting me as it had been heaved up by the explosion.

I must have crossed over to the starboard side for I remember quite vividly, the sea all alight due to the escaping petrol, but vague as to where I saw an overturned lifeboat. I do recall quite clearly passing the midship's hatch that was belching out flames as I crossed back over to the port side, and then walking slowly aft down the promenade deck and past open toilet and cabin doors. Slowly, not because I didn't think there was still an urgent situation to overcome, but because I was trying to get my head to tell me which was the best way to find a life-jacket. Mine was in the radio room.

Somehow it seemed that although thankfully I had an intact head on my shoulders, good answers were slow in forthcoming. I was jolted back into quick thinking action when a loud plop, which suppressed itself into a long hiss, made its presence known about a dozen yards behind me. It looked like a ball of fire wrapped up in black smoke.

I don't think my feet touched the deck for the next two or three yards towards my cabin, and then a quick Charlie Chaplin turn to starboard brought me level with the companion ladder leading down to the well deck. As I turned and commenced to descend, I was looking right into my cabin. There was so much of me in there. It was like leaving home.

I climbed up and shot in with the thought to collect a few valuables. I grabbed some Niello work jewellery that I had bought in Bangkok to take home, some packets of correspondence and a few other items, then lacking any pocket-room, I stuffed them in my skin-out bag: a ring that dropped, I put on my little finger. In this bent position, the pain assailed me again and I sat on the high door-coaming and hugged my middle.

It is again interesting that I should give a few odds and ends priority over the more pressing need of self preservation.

I have only a vague recollection of what followed. Apparently, when I had seen Arthur and Noel in the well-deck, they were looking up at a raft lashed to the mast rigging, but were having difficulty in launching it, - it had jammed on its skids. Then later, just as I was joining them it suddenly plopped down into the sea, taking with it, the tether-line which should have kept it near the ship.

Arthur said later that before he had time to think he went in after it, perhaps with the subconscious thought of stopping the raft before it drifted away. In view of the fuel that was burning on top of the water and approaching down the length of the *'Pinna'* in a large arc, it was a very courageous thing to do. Arthur said, 'it was a bloody daft thing to have done'. Many

years later, Arthur was to receive the MBE for a similar unselfish act in descending into a gas filled chamber to rescue some workmen.

He had to duck and swim under the flames before reaching the raft then furiously paddling it to halt it Noel climbed on next after receiving a line from Arthur, and then after that, they both hauled me aboard.

My memory of that 'first it's hot, then it's cold' swim to the raft has dimmed to oblivion like a dream upon awaking when the more one tries to remember and recall it, the more vague it becomes. It has been Arthur's memory that has helped to record those last few minutes.

Paddling furiously to keep away from the ignited water surface, we picked up the boson, and looking beyond him, the *'Pinna'* was ablaze from for'd to midships with black smoke billowing up and trailing horizontally. Then from high up on the stern of the *'Pinna'* came hoarse shouting. It was the 3rd mate Sandy Robertson, very recognisable by his untidy red beard. He had been responsible for the safe lowering of the only port side lifeboat that got away - in fact the only available lifeboat- after which Sandy had been left behind. Not only was he the last man to leave the ship, he was a very angry Scotsman.

What he had been doing in the interim period from the boat getting away to appearing on the stern, I never thought to ask, but now he was an even more angry Scot, for he thought that we were paddling away from him. We were not. Just the reverse. His coloured shouts were anything but complimentary ones. It was during this little drama that we had back-paddled to pick up the ship' s boson who was swimming pushing a life belt that was supporting him, and trying to dodge the surface flames that were spreading fast and which would soon be overtaking us Having got the message into his head that we were trying to get near to him and not the reverse, we finally persuaded him to jump (it was a long way down to the water from where he was). He made a very big splash and followed that with many expletives emphasising that he was done for. After catching the boson's life jacket that Noel had thrown, we eventually got him onto the raft.

Paddling to and picking up Sandy could have been our undoing, for now, with so much weight on the raft (five of us) our efforts to paddle to safety could not compete with the capillary attraction of the 'Pinna' and the advancing ignited water. We also had another worry, although unnecessary, thinking that the circling aircraft might start the aggro again. However on scanning around we spotted the lifeboat which hitherto had been obscured from our view by the *'Pinna'*. The captain in the lifeboat had not, as I learned later, purposely left Sandy behind. The lifeboat had been snatched away from the ship's side, and then Sandy had disappeared from view. Our shouts to the Captain's lifeboat were not necessary. He had now seen us, and was rowing towards us and eventually towed the raft away.

Shortly afterwards, we were all picked up by the RNVR "Bulan', and then later transferred to its launch. I recall, upon boarding the "Bulan', having the contented feeling that my skin-out bag was still round my neck!

The Malay crew on the "Bulan's" launch were very attentive, immediately providing the British comfort for all circumstances - tea. Most of us had got away with only minor burns, mine being somewhat self-inflicted by my return to the radio room, but Captain Thomas and the mate were in poor shape and needed more professional treatment than could be administered on the launch. That reason alone was as good as any for us to get away from the side of the "Bulan". With those aircraft around, it seemed a greater priority than drinking tea.

As we were being ferried across the two or three miles of water to Changi on the south eastern tip of Singapore island, the exhilaration that I was still alive and in one piece diminished as I looked out from the launch. Looking one way, Singapore lay beneath a canopy of black smoke with numerous funnels of smoke betwixt cloud and earth: looking the other way, the *'Pinna'* and the sea all around it was enveloped in flames and more black smoke contrasting vividly against a cloudless sky.

The feeling that I had in Palembang of being hemmed in now changed to being trapped in - of having sailed out of the frying pan and into the fire.

-- Next: Another Door Part 3: In Beleaguered Singapore Negotiating Fullerton road and Robinson road and finally Anson road junction we arrived at the mission...

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PHOTO ALBUM

1956-57 - RAMON RIGG, GANGES BOYS ON HMS SUPERB'S FOCASTLE, ANCHORED OFF SHOTLEY

1956-57 - RAMON RIGG, GANGES BOYS ONBOARD HMS SUPERB, ANCHORED OFF SHOTLEY

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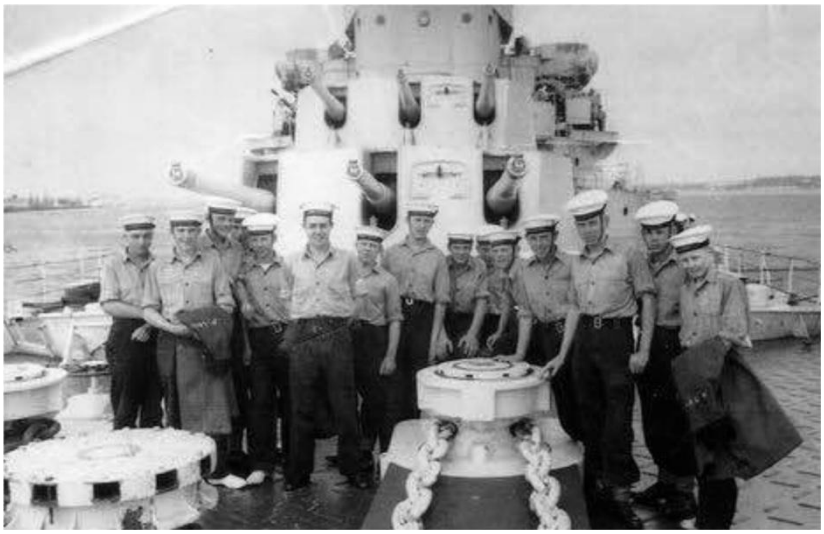

1957, 7TH MAY - DENIS WOODHAMS, 04 RECR., GRENVILLE, 17 MESS, CLASS VISIT TO HMS SUPERB OFF SHOTLEY, ROBBIE ROBERTS 2ND RIGHT

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)

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Hi Brian. Once again Andy has come up with something that i have a little bit of knowledge about, Ukraine; my youngest son lives there, in Kharkiv and runs his own school teaching English. Kharkiv being about 25 miles from the border means I watch news broadcasts with a keen eye, especially RT News. He has been out there for about 8 years and is married to a Ukrainian girl. I talk to him every 2 weeks; his slant on the Russia/Ukraine situation is that he sees about 30 ambulances every day coming back from the border. Another thing is any time we go out to play them at football he has to keep his head down, especially at this moment with the game in Rome.

When he first went out there he did not have a work ticket and got picked up by the police. He missed that particular evening's, extra lesson which was to the wives of some of the government officials of the day. Being able to talk English is the latest in thing for them. The women asked why he was missing and once they knew he got his work ticket the next day. If you remember the leading contender for President got poisoned, he was working for those who had done it - but not for long.

He loves the life style out there including hunting wild boar, great skiing and the total madness on the roads. He is ex RA and says the Canadians seem to be very helpful with regards to the artillery. **Malcolm Milham**

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THE END