

Hello Shipmates

Some time ago Rob suggested previous ship stories would be okay for inclusion.

A trawl through the dust in my glory hole provided snaps that could serve to lace this together

The vessel in question is the *Gorregan*, an Isle class trawler, built, I think, at Selby, Yorks in 1944.



Just out of some kind of reserve, a 12 pounder removed from the well deck, replaced by Oerlikan tubs, plus an instrument space and spare officer's cabin in its place. The work was done to suit *HMS Vernon* requirements for a trials vessel, to locate and de-activate ground mines. The R.N lagged behind in this art as they became more sophisticated, more selective in what they detonated for and when. This period had a new description coined for the 'clearance task'. The word 'sweeping' was dropped for 'hunting' in those squadrons on 'ground mine location', it being more electronic as opposed to 'sweeps with cutters'. Our Captain was a two and a half, Roberts V.C. of submarine fame, removal of unexploded bomb from 'outer casing' whilst under threat of enemy aircraft turning up and being abandoned 'trapped in casing'. I think he was a Middie at that time.

*Gorregan's* crew was a mere handful but he totally failed to connect with any lower deck, uncommunicative and dour. If on the bridge with him at sea never a friendly enquiring word, him in right corner, you in left. He eventually left, replaced by a really great Fleet Air Arm Senior Commander; must have been completing his time in the mob, obviously of advanced years. A 'sailor's sailor' his yacht, when tied up alongside, was nearly as long as his trawler, crew person

was his wife, lived ashore a lot just a mile along the road at Hoares Inn, South Queensferry. Our home port being *HMS Lochinvar* at Port Edgar, South Queensferry, virtually in the shadow of the Forth rail bridge. Our squadron consisted of six wooden, so called, Mickey Mouses, diesel engine "L" sweepers for electric mines.

A party piece, in at least two of them, was reaching up from the mess table slowly sinking a dinner knife up to the hilt in an overhead beam. Story was of rushed construction during the 'great struggle' - WW2, with unseasoned timber, still green in parts, in the U.S.A. Our captain's F.A.A. Heritage obvious from the attention from F.A.A. pilots at Donibristle, their airfield north of the Forth.

A roar to startle Old Nick - had all ready to change Y-fronts as one or two planes tried to get between the chimney and mast, out of the blue at break-neck speed. From my time in *Triumph* I know, when allowed a play period, F.A.A. young pilots border on the lunatic, to look down on them from a sponson below flight deck level, thrilled me beyond belief or, having a go at the 'towed splash target' with guns and rockets - then - such play allowed them to fly into Taranto harbour and decimated a chunk of Italian fleet in a bi-plane that does 90 mph when pressed, whose 'skin' was 'Irish linen' plus two coats of dope - the sort of spec the R.A.F. saddled the F.A.A. with before the navy got that service back.



Gorregan leader 51st Mine Hunting Squadron with her brood, all captained by young lieutenants on their first command.

'Trawler coaling' was done on a wall outside Rosyth dockyard next to the Boom Defence School. Their sleeve badge, long gone, a shackle crossed by a marlin spike. Their vessels were all coal burners with names beginning with BAR, capable of lifting 24 tons on their

bow horns, a midget submarine of that time.

Coaling followed R.N. tradition, no one excused, braid included. Stokers had all upper deck jobs. 12 ton mineral rail wagons at wall's edge above the ship bunker hatch, when clips are knocked off by a stoker an avalanche roared down in a cloud of dust that covered everything. Attempts at sealing off mess decks etc. was done with toilet rolls spread with pusser's soft soap - bandage-like -. The finest dust still got into every nook and cranny. Trimming inside bunkers was strictly seaman's work; face mask was a strip of wet flannel as coal poured in, vision was marginal but breathing dust-free was vital. All went well 'til the level got up, then the cry 'Push into corners and sides'; eventually one lay prone - still trying to get another cubic foot or two on

board, a proper knuckle-skinner. Dust and fines that settled to bunker bottom had an alternative use, especially savoured by our officer trio.

Just beyond the seaward side of the bridge a pair of buoys, suitable for the largest of liners such as would wait for high tide, allowing entry to Thomas Ward's famous Inverkeithing ship breaking yard.

R.N. ships also used those buoys, a favourite of the 51st being *Vanguard* which we passed in the narrow fairway on the way out in the morning and back for late tea. One had to look tidy and disciplined to 'pipe the Admiral' as we all passed. Stokers pre-empted that salute by a few minutes. Boiler room blowers turned up to warp factor nine, both bottom fires were open being fed with maniacal zeal, heaps of dust and fines which blew along top of fires under pressure from fans, up the chimney a cloud of oily smuts, the plan was to settle on the *Vanguard*. If their O.O.W. had his telescope on us the utmost glee would be observed with the bridge ducked down below the dodger; childish, but the real deal for getting our small band single-minded.

A radical change to get back to subject I started out with, ground mines!

They lay on the bottom, often covered in mud, being a heavy item. Getting into its magnetic field somehow was key to knowing its presence. Our ship towed a long aluminium pipe, on a bridal; spaced rubber covered tails every so often had inductance coils along their length. Coils



coils tied up for stowing.

Progress at a stately 3 knots or less; 'otter boards' on pipe to just clear bottom ground. All electrically connected up towing cable to cabin on well deck, inductance coil wipes mine and shows on paper trace. Counter mining the target in a harbour could not be an ad hoc affair with random dropped charges, cables, pipe lines, buoyage would be at risk. 'Diver over

side', mixture bottles, not hard hat, with an open net of approximately 6" squares, 4' x 6" x 8'. Net made of *Cordtex*, which comes on plywood rolls and is about  $1\frac{1}{2}$  times as thick as a pusser's cod line. Commonly known as instantaneous fuse it burns at 22,000 foot per second. Three or four wraps round 109 lb. rail track will cut it clean when detonated.

Those who went through the diving school demolition course - clearing fairways - will be familiar with it.

*The Demolition Men* show on TV has it laid out to, may be, dozens of charges on a structure requiring simultaneous firing.



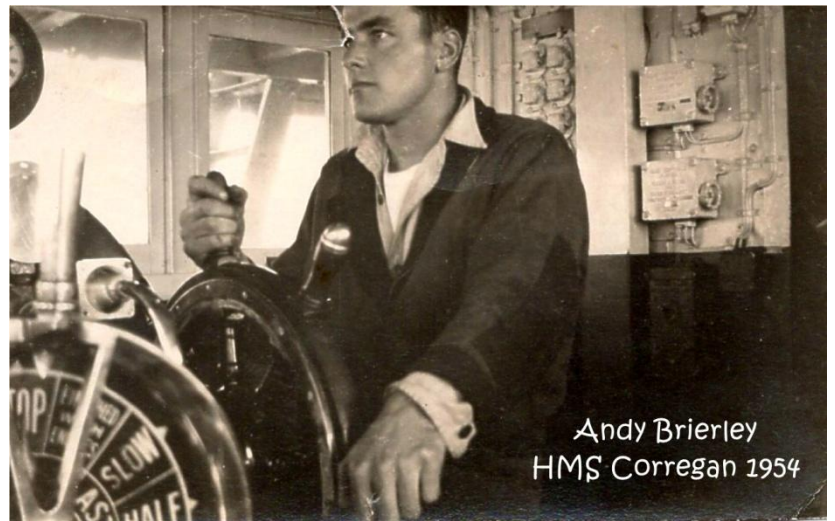


Another aid was the strangest little ASDIC transducer. It may have avoided hitting moored mines besides seeing the ground variety.

A ball, about the size of a medicine ball, to ship it a brass tube with a 4" bore penetrated the hull centre line, high enough inboard to be above the water line, in what passed as ASDIC space. A small chain, seen in photo, is lowered down this tube to hang well out of the ship's bottom. It was caught in

the usual way of heaving a line over the bow on both sides. Then walked to location where the chain emerged. The ends of line walked back to bow with a chain captive, brought inboard, walked back amidships, shackled onto the top of the ASDIC shaft that was lowered as the chain was recovered to the ASDIC space; connect electrics, hey presto, starts to ping; a Heath Robinson system known in its entirety as E.R.L. Thank the Lord the current magic system bears no remote relationship to that.

Final 'Clark Gable' in the wheel house below the open bridge. As the anchor was up and down all day, the helmsman left the wheel, walked the catwalk to the foc'sle with his 2lb. Ball Pein hammer, slipped when bridge shouted; fathoms were called out as normal. He did his allotted task on deck until it was up anchor and back to the wheel.



A couple of the stokers lived an easy up-homers north of the Forth. At day's end the skipper lined the seven of us up for a race to the Forth Bridge. To allow the stokers a quick departure for home, seamen shovelled coal whilst they washed and dressed; at flag drop diesel M.M.s were away in front, but as triple expansion got going on solid gun metal bearings our chief - an E.R.A. - kept feeling them in case the cooling hose was called for, seldom did we lose the race. Multi tasking, a new word these days, was normal practise on the trawlers to the ship's great advantage, most knew how to use the DECCA navigator on the bridge. A priceless education I would not swap for an honours degree at Cambridge in some fart-arse profession; insatiable curiosity sated ... and all for sixpence and a big orange a week.

This is October 3rd at 5 p.m. Can think of another thing I would rather be doing even though the monsoon continues in Newington.