

Hello Shipmates,

That's four Secretaries of State for War in less than six months. Their assigned minion must have gotten quite breathless, locating the jobsworth in charge of the key to executive water closet - signing it out - then shortly back in, a frantic return to ensure the next ministerial sitter in not incomed. Depending on who gets next turn 'His' or 'Her' seats have got to be swapped round. This vital activity in the background discharged by 'on-call gang' in the Ministry of Works, is quite unbeknown to the lay person who thinks H.M. Ministers have an easy time. The new appointee obviously had a deep meditative moment whilst perched upon the porcelain, a neuron fired in the stygian blackness of his grey matter, 'Eureka' - we must dispatch another 'Billion Pound' destroyer with dubious maintenance record to 'Straits of Hormuz'.

Visualise her Captain pondering, 'Have we enough juice in the tank to get that far?', opening his secret orders at midnight in a bolted cabin.



The A4 sheet says, - 'Be alert for plastic skiffs, with large outboard and half a ton of plastic explosive in its forepeak'. You may assume this as a weak attempt at humour, be aware it is a 'wail of deep despair' at the powers that be, unable to field an appropriate response that will avoid a host of willing cannon fodder getting their heads blown off, or meekly putting their hands up in surrender to the 'realms' and 'Royal Navy's' absolutely shameful embarrassment - as occurred a

couple of years ago with an 'Officer lead' contingent from a Duke class frigate.

Big question, what did we learn from that? The unmistakable odour of purification pervades all.

When one sees countries like - Columbia - no mistake design and build 'Offshore Patrol Vessels' able to operate in littoral waters or blue water - small, swift, manoeuvrable, really well armed, and armoured in appropriate places to withstand OS fire, or Singapore's late super O.P.V's or, nearer to home, Irish O.P.V's built in Devon, a yard closed last month for want of an order; a skilled core of this island's best builders gone. The Irish offshore patrol vessels take their turn in the Gulf of Aden, the Indian Ocean on 'pirate patrol', not bad for O.P.V's, cheapish, but with the ability to give you a savage bite in the Arris if provoked; usual opponents, plastic speed boats mounting largest outboards on the transom.

Politicians straight from university to Whitehall or Brussels have no concept of vessel most used, utilised by a global navy to combat common bad manners. Russian subs now loiter at will in Faslane's back yard; we have not one Maritime Patrol aircraft on the nation's inventory, a situation that has prevailed for many years. BUT! We have a SUPER CARRIER, it leaks a lot, cannot operate proper naval aircraft - if we had any - requirement for which determined by politicians not by knowledgeable naval cabinets.

Function seems to be allowing politicians, full of hiss to strut their pride 'showing off' their large erection, every junior school pupil in any language, worldwide, gets his first story 'The Emperor Without any Clothes'; our, non-existent, wardrobe cost six billion pounds.

The need for many small vessels has been an R.N. requirement since Horrid Henry set the service up, traditionally most come from commerce, hundreds of coal burning trawlers, drifters, whalers, holiday paddle steamers and their like in size and use. At onset of WW2 6000 men on 600 boats were called to the colours, it grew to 66,000 men and 6000 vessels. The number may stagger you, be assured it is no wild guess and many of these vessels were in their 'second' war; 500 ships from that fleet were lost in all the oceans of the world with just short of 14,000 crew. The invasion threat following Dunkirk was dismissed by Churchill, who assured the nation that it was secure from surprise attack by 200 of that motley fleet.

Their port division was Lowestoft, their nickname of Harry Tate's Navy came from the music hall comedian whose act included an old motor car that gradually fell apart during his performance; the proper title was **The Royal Navy Patrol Service**. Do not confuse it with Coastal Forces Command, a strictly R.N. division led and directed by the navy proper!! M.T.B's, M.L's etc.

The Patrol Service was crewed by fishermen, R.N. reservists, R.N.V.R members with a bolstering of conscripts. The R.N.P.S is unknown today by even most R.N. personnel, they were part of, but distinctly clear of, the regular R.N. Headquarters in the municipal gardens on the front at Lowestoft called Sparrows Nest was mentioned on the airwaves several times by Lord Haw Haw, remember him?



Communication rates came from the 'white collar' world, not R.N. signal schools. It is a fact only nodding to naval discipline was observed by those fishermen, lightermen, trawlermen. They lost more vessels than any other R.N. branch, a breathtaking attrition rate. They have a cenotaph at Port Division Lowestoft with 3000 names of those with 'no know grave but the sea'. I tried for a picture but my book of military monuments had gone A.W.O.L.! **[I have found one here - hope it's the correct one (Brian)]**

The unique contribution by the Royal Navy Patrol Service was marked by a tiny silver badge to be worn on the left sleeve, above the cuff. I enclose a picture of that alongside a 20 pence piece.

*Actual badge size alongside a 20 pence piece
How miserable is that !*



I feel, for their service strung across all oceans, 'pinging' and 'rescuing' countless Merchant Marine people, Russian convoys to the U.S. east coast, north Atlantic to southern Ocean on meagre coal bunkers, with the stability of an empty barrel, living in ex-fish holds, wet in any kind of seaway, that badge is the most insignificant bit of metal in the whole world of 'awards'. Notice four holes to sew it on. Represented is a net with mines in opposite quarters and a shark going downwards - mine sweeping and anti sub patrols.

I cannot help thinking about a hot chestnut in our present world, and, be certain politicians of any hue are far from my mind; if we got involved in another debacle like the last sea war, where are our host of small ships? Hull, Grimsby, Yarmouth, Fleetwood, Aberdeen, Peterhead and all ports in between hardly had room for an

additional match stick when fishing fleets were in. I think it was Edward Heath who sounded the death knell for all their jobs, the fish landed and exported, plus food for a multitude of home bodies.

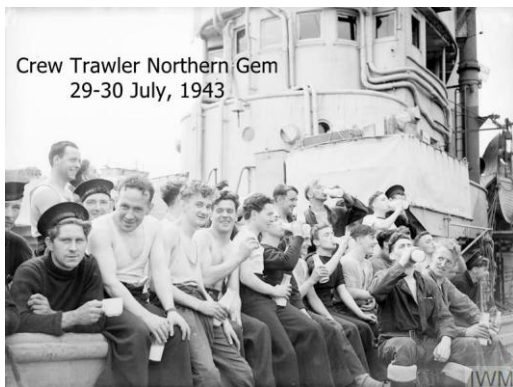
Ship breakers waxed fat on a surfeit of, otherwise unsalable, trawlers. Newsreels recorded countless wooden M.F.V's put to the chainsaw to feed huge beachside bonfires. Their British Fishing Grounds, under E.U. directive, became Belgian, French, Spanish quota areas, fished frequently by ex-U.K owned vessels, bought for peanuts.

I see today's news has Nicola Sturgeon - an apt name here - declare she will joining Corbyn to thwart Brexit. To me, that means the treasured Scot's Fishing Grounds are no longer of interest. The jobs with vital knock-on of trawler construction, priceless resources when the balloon goes up.



Trawlers with the prefix Northern used to be as common as sea gulls. Their name has ever seemed special after reading the tale of **Northern Gem**, and the fight with **Hipper** on a Russian convoy. Destroyer **Achates**, hit frequently, eventually succumbed. One hit on her bridge killed all plus the gathered wounded. **Onshow** also took a pounding from cruiser **Hipper**, her Captain Sherbrooke earned the V.C. at that fight, he also lost an eye, but survived. **Northern Gem** stayed with them throughout, though only as an escort trawler, without a doctor. She rescued countless from

Achtes crew, then saved a large number of those hauled from the Barents Sea with hypothermia. All in a raging blizzard gale for the next three days. That only skirts the ghastly tale of the trip to Murmansk.



To move on - three distant water trawlers entered my world for scrapping, one with the magic name of **Northern Sceptre**. At that time I suffered a severe attack of kleptomania, and realised I urgently had to 'take something' for it. Thus I removed **Sceptre's** binnacle to my conservatory at home, plus its beautiful engine telegraph, in several shades of brass and phosphor bronze. It cured the malady - for a short period.

All a bit of a windbag tour, but memories tumble in when one is enjoying the scribble and I am sure you will make a wee bit of sense of it.

As a parting shot, here a true tale of a 'monocled Squadron leader' at Cape Town OPS Centre, who was talking down to a trawler skipper lieutenant who had just returned from a rough trip. He said, in brief, blunt terms to the Brylcream man, 'If you had another monocle up your arse, you may make a decent telescope!'

It made this degenerate grin.