

Shipmates,

A bit, a couple of weeks ago, in the TV Times entitled '*War Movies Based on Books*'. Amongst my stuff - for want of a better word - is a DVD of *The Cruel Sea*; I thoroughly enjoyed the book. The film was nowhere near able to match the author's descriptive writing but has many lovely shots of the show's star *Compass Rose*



It must be teaching you to suck eggs by saying his name, Nicholas Monsarrat; another book of his is entitled *Three Corvettes*.

Authorative writing stemmed from him joining the R.N.V.R. (Wavy Navy) at the outbreak of W.W.2. The Admiralty's first war emergency build programme was unlimited convoy escorts based on the Antarctic whale catchers, with a harpoon gun over the bull ring - quickly dispensed with to be replaced by a single 4"

LA'HA in a gun tub about three feet high on the foc'sle, just in front of the bridge structure. The outer ring of the tub had ready-use ammo lockers, crews to man the gun crowded into the tiny fo'c'sle. These small vessels could be built by any hole-in-the-corner yard capable of putting a distant water trawler together in fairly quick time.

A distinct disadvantage was keeping, as designed, the hull form, 'forefoot' going backwards and down at a steep angle to the area of the bilge keel resulting in a reluctance to lift at sea. Extra weight of gun plus tub and ammo + crew made the alteration in her sea-keeping readily apparent.

"A very wet fo'c'sle in any sort of seaway and vicious rolling", Monsarrat wrote, "Little space, no comfort, everywhere sodden with sea water, humid, ill-ventilated and said to induce sickness to the most hardened mariners".

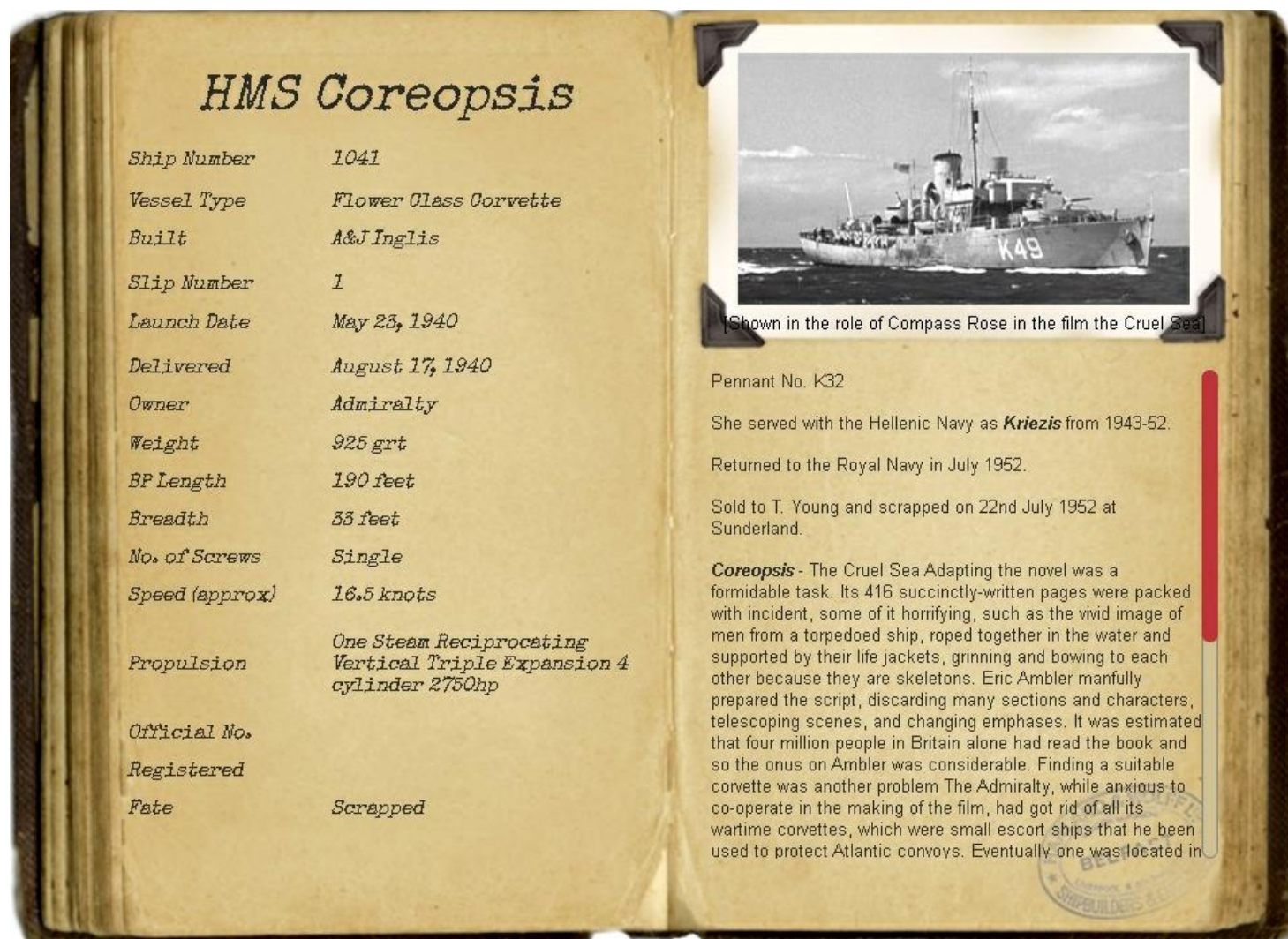
His knowledge of conditions comes from being 1<sup>st</sup> lieutenant on *HMS Campanula* for his war. That tells you the class in question was *Flower Class*. Convoy Commodores frequently referring to them as their 'herbaceous borders'; pretty name considering their operation area.

Following a year at sea in the North Atlantic, having experienced nature's worst weather in the area, he was judged a very competent 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant who had seen plenty of hideous human suffering amongst survivors pulled out of fuel oil; burning still, torpedo strikes, hypothermic etc.

His father had been a surgeon; thus to the Admiralty that was sufficient for him to be given the post on board. Nicholas had no interest in surgery never touched a scalpel or studied medicine. His description of a night's work when under attack was like the worst horror film of a life time.

His solace was breakfast, the all-time favourite; a door step of Pussers fried bread, golden brown on both sides with a powdered egg omelette and a thin brew of coffee essence.

There I can declare a similarity with him, often saying to Jo I could just devour a lump of fried bread done in the deep fat fryer, a standalone delicacy to me who loves all fried things - the crispier the fry, the better!

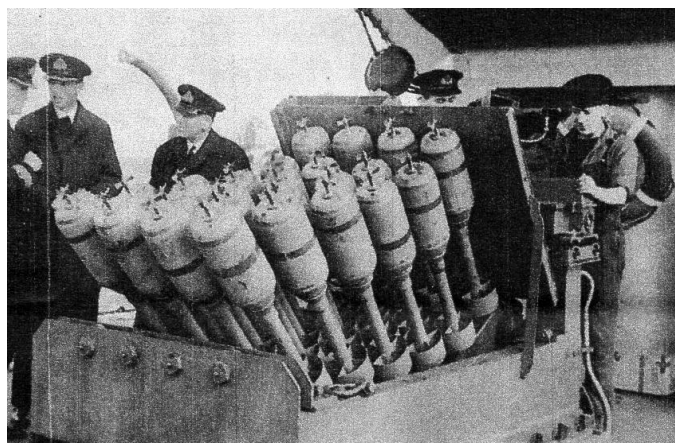


Monsarrat voiced a deep loathing for black marketers, especially rich men who could afford to buy up several old bangers then apply for a petrol ration for each, a mockery of the ration system, to a man whose official job was attempting to mend broken and burnt bodies from tankers sunk on Atlantic crossings.

The weight question on *Flowers Class* worsened when R.A.D.A.R. came in; rotating antennae sat at highest point on top of wireless office at back of bridge; then HD and DF aerials came in requiring aerials at very top of mast.

A single 2-pounder pom-pom in a tub half way up the funnel height was tacked on for anti-aircraft deterrence, with ready-use lockers, of course.

Room for 40 depth charges with two rails of 12 on the quarterdeck plus 8 more up each side of the galley area to feed two D'C motors each side.



All that adds up to a gross disturbance of fore and aft centres of gravity. To accommodate this massive crew expansion, the break in the fo'c'sle was moved along from half way, where a 4" gun tub sat, to a line at the rear of funnel. I can imagine how intimate one's existence - even with the extra space - was.

Forgot to mention hanging out of the ship's bottom opposite the high R.A.D.A.R. aerial was the large ASDIC DOME with its weighty transducer rotating inside, like the pendulum on a clock a swinging counter weight. The corps of naval constructors, down in Bath, did not seem to learn a lot about the area of operation.



Loading Squid anti-submarine mortar

Also forgot to mention the weight added when SQUID (3-barrelled ship-mounted anti-submarine weapon) that only registered bomb hits, was loaded onto starboard side of fo'c'sle next to bridge.

The wartime built destroyers only had bunkering to get half way across the Atlantic, even though oil and turbine powered; that meant break from convoy at a most critical period half way across where the U-boats lurked knowing what was about to occur.

The Royal Navy design went from bottom to top; the fleet 'prima donna' that toured the world with Prince Whatsisname and Lord Louis Mountbatten had inadequate deck armour, even following the major midlife refit; it cost all but three of the crew their lives.

That's it for the moment but be assured of my best regards and a toast to your good health.