

H.M.S. SUPERB (CRUISER) ASSOCIATION

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CHAIRMAN OF THE ASSOCIATION, BRIAN SAUNDERS

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Superb - Defending Britain Since 1710



ANDY BRIERLEY'S BLOG

G'day Shipmates,

Was interested in who may unseat one of our European 'friends and 'N.A.T.O. ally' in France, President Macron; the candidates and their stance bewildered somewhat. Talk of Gaullists and Bonapartists don't seem to fit into what I think is a socialist nation. Why Bonaparte's legacy holds such appeal is a mystery, knowing he denuded what was a good rural economy; 200,000 Frenchmen killed in his 1812 army. He set off on his Russian campaign with 615,000 French plus allied soldiers; on return to France survivors numbered 100,000, ill-equipped and starving.



It's Okay - I've seen Putin - all sorted !

Mobility for that force provided by horses, of course, which became catastrophic when they became the only source of food and the army lost its mobility by eating them.

I cannot help wondering why France so dislikes anything done in the way of alliances by the U.K. or says so at N.A.T.O. meetings. I feel certain we have no desire to run N.A.T.O., unlike President Macron who has no wish to accept the U.S.A. as its massive contributor in men and material; it would be a very hollow organisation without their \$s.

Britain and France were once strong partners in the 1860 wars with China when we both wished to stamp our authority on that place and people - any piddling excuse being good enough to mount a foray against them. Storming the ports on Fai Ho river estuary, the armies then went up river to Peking where the French ransacked and looted the Summer Palace. The British, also needing to be put in the picture and leave their mark, burned down what remained.

The Chinese had to be put in their place. We may think they have long memories, and make no mistake, they are not charitable ones to the pair of us.

Very noticeable in yesterday's paper, a string of R.A.F. and Naval assets about to get onto the illegal migrants crossing the Channel. The way it reads seems to be a prime period for further misunderstanding between two countries that could get nasty. I despair of politicians who, on fat salaries, have not the faintest idea of how to defuse such situations without casting dire threats about; ones we are unable to execute any way, being poor as church mice nationally. - oops - there's a glum start to thoughts loitering in my grey matter.

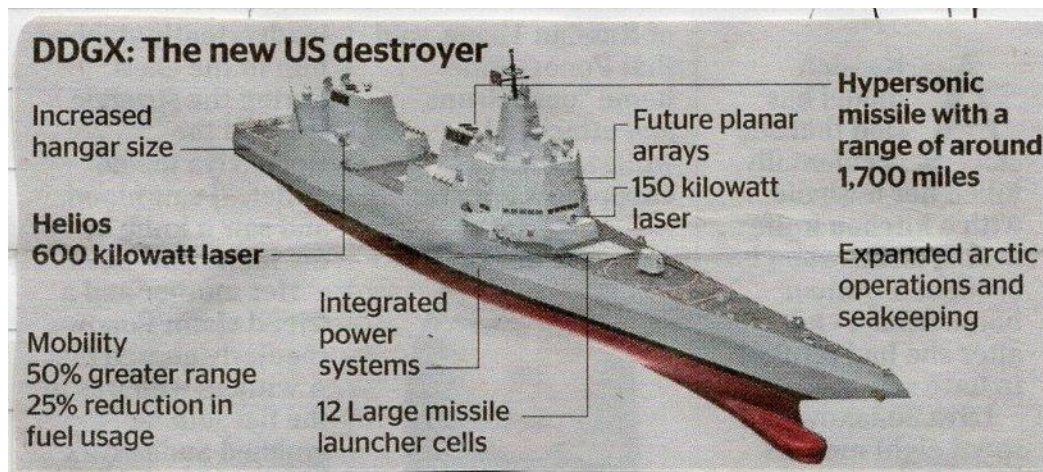


NEW TACK; The world's navies must be waiting with high interest to see more details about the U.S. Navy's next class of destroyer, reportedly known as D.D.G.X. They are to replace all *Arleigh Burkes*. 69 in number, also *Ticonderogas*, 22 in number by about 2032; that is a staggering number of destroyers. The aim is to get hypersonic missiles at sea as a counter to the claimed Chinese and Russian threats.

Mach 5 is the speed claimed for rockets being developed by joint U.S. navy and army research centres. Two types of laser gun under development are claimed capable of shooting down missiles of that sort of speed. This high-tech cutting-edge programme is in the hands of manager Katherine Connolly. That gives one confidence in its execution; she has, because of 'diversity', to be reasonably young, not an old government Washington clone.

Chance of me seeing one launched seems remote, *tempus fugit* being the current enemy of long term planning.

The good news for the U.S. Navy is their capability with rapid serial build programmes, started with Liberty ships.



Arleigh Burkes rolled down the slipways of several yards as regular as clockwork; those vessels being the yardstick by which 'any destroyer in the world' is judged; the only anti-ballistic missile capable

vessel currently at sea with their *Aegis* radar. The new item has a projected cost of one billion \$ U.S. a copy.

I am not amazed by that as our own latest D class - those Portsmouth Wall decorations that fail to sail in warm water = were reportedly one billion sterling per copy, though the magazines are judged inadequate; had the mags. been larger I guess they would sail with them half empty.

News of the new U.S.N. Type has galvanised our M.O.D. into action (on paper). A new class of super destroyer of 16,000 tons, properly armed, capable of defending carrier groups to be designated Type 55 (suggested name *Dominator Class*) which the M.O.D. says will have revolutionary capability?, that must mean a proper mix of A.A. and ship-to-land attack missiles to counter any peer type the enemy may have in build.



I do not gamble but I understand form, that tells me this mythical vessel will never see reality simply because the department charged with its birth is 'totally unfit for purpose', incapable of its execution.

The late First Sea Lord Radkin knew this and spoke of it when elevated to Chief of the General Staff, but was powerless against that fiefdom of established civil servants. The navy has a desire for what they call Type 83; these numbers confuse me, I can only think they are meant to, not being very bright in the first place; it is a cruiser-sized vessel. The proposals get larger with meagre basic armaments staying much the same; a current new build Russian frigate with hypersonic missiles quite capable of its elimination.

Engine room problems in the current R.N. 'D Class' Type 45 destroyers beggars belief; the first to be rectified returns to the fleet in 2026, with the rest of the flotilla - 4 ships- complete by 2033. Such a time scale is ridiculous, with no one needing to wonder why U.K. ship building is with the Dodo.

Canada and Australia purchased only hull plans for Type 26 Global frigates. Proposals shown by both will deliver a vessel armed for the world we see now. Economy with man-o-war arms fitted is tantamount to abuse, misuse of crew.

It is reported those old D Class destroyers will join the fleet with an extra 24 Sea Ceptor A.A. missiles. I was amazed to learn the space will be gained from a GYM being replaced! I am scared these upgrades may eventually require elimination of the massage parlour or, horror of horrors, the Gay Bar. If the crap hits the fan they will not know what hit them.

Hospital interlude

If there was a bright side to growing old, knowing one could do it gracefully was comforting. Alas, another glaring example of my inability to 'pick the good seed from the chaff'. It happened for me recently with little grace, more like being hit by the Flying Scotsman with its 'hurtle valve' wide open on a down grade.

Jo had told one Shipmate on the phone I had a knee problem; it was one affliction I did not have, it was plausible though as currently I have most major maladies gently maturing in mankind. I was first in the operating theatre two days in succession - not swinging the lamp about that - requested local anaesthetics but lucked out on that.

Gas has a strange effect on me and was away with the fairies for a pair of nights, engaged in rugby scrums with various numbers of nurses. Two periods of extreme violent pain had me wishing I had an On/Off switch in my ball bag; would have been sore tempted to switch off several hours into the second night; makes me sound like a wimp quitter but then I was at the point of extreme exhaustion. I am aware it is most immodest to talk of oneself, me I, me I.



A couple of shipmates have enquired what happened, the foregoing a thumbnail sketch attempt to explain. I did feel life had gone full circle when leaving Ganges with a rail warrant, many moons ago, and the instruction; "You are now going down to Pembroke".

On my back in A & E Medway Maritime Hospital a couple of weeks ago a nurse said, "Now you are going down to Pembroke". The ward being named after the old barracks down the road - wry smile.

First morning in theatre all bling is removed, watch, necklace, nose ring etc. My full top denture was removed also; on ward recovery denture was handed back - in six pieces. No molars on top means normal eating is a major trial. A diet of 'slop' or 'raw pallet' are the options. Of course no one wants to know - hurrah for 'care at the point of need'.

I feel that's enough for any old piece of stuff so will bid you all a hearty 'farewell'.

Be seeing you soon.



REUNION REMINDER

THIS YEAR'S REUNION WILL BE HELD OVER THE WEEKEND OF FRIDAY 13TH AND SUNDAY 15TH MAY

DOWNLOAD A BOOKING FORM NOW – CLICK ON THE BADGE



The main event i.e. The Dinner is held on the Saturday but it's also important to attend the AGM (a messdeck natter which is informal & of short duration!) on the Friday evening if you can make it

The Hotel goes out of its way to make us comfortable - the cost of the 2 nights includes Dinner, Bed & Breakfast on the Friday and Saturday & Breakfast on Sunday morning. There's plenty of good humour and loads of raffle prizes. Why not give it a whirl?

IF YOU CANNOT MAKE THE WHOLE WEEKEND AND LIVE LOCALLY - COME FOR THE SATURDAY DINNER ONLY





NOZZERS GO WEST Part 33

Then, on Sunday it was announced that divisions would be held on the jetty. There was no explanation as to why but naval officers of any rank; let alone those of commodore status, do not give explanations. Naturally, divisions were followed by a march past accompanied by the Royal Marine Band and as soon as that was accomplished a Sunday service was held on the quarterdeck. This time they had a captive audience because at the conclusion of the march past, the parade was marched up the after gangway and straight onto the quarterdeck. That meant there were so many people and nowhere near enough seats resulting in as many having to stand at the back as there were sitting down: Freddie had figured how to get his congregation attendance figures up. With so many voices in accord, although not necessarily in tune, it was a miracle that the awning didn't lift off like a giant kite when 'For those in peril on the sea' reached full throttle.

The quarterdeck was centre of attention again only a couple of days later when, at the completion of the Regatta the prize winners mustered there to receive their prizes from that day's main event. There had been a lot of oars and sails and training and straining over the previous week or so in preparation for the Regatta, as everyone wanted to win and at the end of it all Superb 'B' took the honours from Superb 'A', Veryan Bay and Mounts Bay.

A few days later the quarterdeck was in full use again, this time for the squadron Regatta Ball. It was Friday the thirteenth, unlucky for some. Unlucky for the boys who had not been invited to attend and, some could say, unlucky for the boys who had not been invited to attend but were not so much invited as ordered, to clean up after. It was their role in life, cleaning up behind everybody else. They were used to it. It was nothing new. They accepted it as a matter of course. They had done it so often they just took it in their stride and that stride started at 0550 the next morning, getting rubber heel marks off the wooden decking with plenty of water, scrubbing and holystones.

There was water aplenty a couple of days later too. More water than they knew what to do with when, just upon completion of divisions and the church service, the heavens opened and they were treated to a tropical rainstorm. The torrential rain fell like steel rods that were under pressure from some almighty seacock above and they didn't discriminate. The awnings on the

quarterdeck had to be sloped as quickly as possible to save the canvas from tearing and to allow the rain to run away and that task, as usual, fell to the boys. Boys in their Sunday best getting thoroughly soaked while the remainder of the ship's company stayed below in the warm and dry.

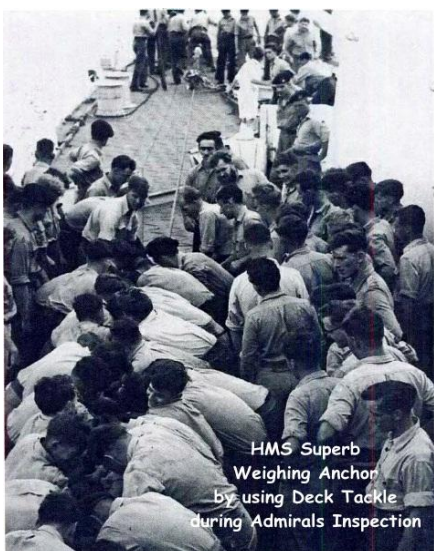
That activity didn't take too long although it was unpleasant and soon they were all back in the mess, changed and dried off and awaiting dinner. But all that goings-on frenzied as it was, was just the tip of the proverbial iceberg as far as activity was concerned, because the word was out that they were now on the slippery slope to Admiral's Inspection and Evolutions where activity, frantic or otherwise, would become an everyday occurrence.

They already had the paintwork gleaming and spotless and it now became clear why. On the other hand that was one less job to worry about. Although 'Admiral's Inspection' had been bandied about by those-in-the-know ever since they had left Antigua all of a month ago, it had not been foremost in most peoples' minds but now it appeared to be the only topic of conversation all day long.

Everything, but everything anywhere and everywhere, from way down below to the top of the masts, had to be painted and what could not be painted had to be polished and what was not polishable had to be scrubbed. This proposed 'inspection' was becoming a right pain.

However, it looked as though they had peaked too early when, as part of the evolution side of things, the Admiral came onboard for the day and took the ship to sea, to put the crew through their paces.

The drills that he dreamed up were very realistic and almost as soon as they were clear of the harbour at 0800, they found themselves closed-up at action



stations for four-inch and anti-aircraft firings that lasted right through dinner-time to secure at 1300. Even after that it



was not an easy time because almost at once he ordered the taking of *Veryan Bay* in tow, to pull her off an imaginary reef, stern first. Luckily the fo'c's'le undertook that evolution assisted by various spare hands for pulling in and paying out purposes and that saved the quarterdeck the aftermath of the ravages of oily wires and heavy cables knocking chunks out of everything. That

completed to his satisfaction, the Admiral then ordered the anchor to be dropped and hoisted up again by man power, using the capstan. Various other tests were carried out and, presumably, passed before they were allowed back in, tired but satisfied with a good days work. The



Admiral and his henchmen gave no indication as to whether they were satisfied with the day's work. All relevant details of the day's events were written down, including their comments on the proceedings and taken ashore in books and folders that they had brought with them.

The day at sea had been the 'sea test' part of the inspection and the results as to how they had fared would not be announced until after the harbour inspection and evolutions part had been completed. This, they were told, was two weeks away and they had those two weeks to prepare.

If they thought that all the preparation done during the preceding weeks was the end of cleaning, they were in for a shock. Having been at sea, albeit just for the day, the upper deck paintwork and in particular, the ship's side, needed doing all over again. At the same time, anyone not over the side on staging with paint brush in hand was found employment down below in the flats and passageways with a scrubber or Bluebell for company. By the time that fortnight had passed the ship was in pristine condition once more and ready to withstand even the most intimate of scrutiny.

To keep them happy during the build up to the inspection, the electricians rigged up loud speakers on the upper deck. They were tuned in to the local radio station that played records almost non-stop.

'This is ZBM Radio Bermuda' was their signature and it appeared that Canada Dry sponsored everything on the station and they never tired of saying so.

The top songs that they played were Katrina Valente singing 'The Breeze and I'. Cowboy singer Slim Whitman with his 'China Doll' and trumpet player Eddie Calvert playing 'Cherry Pink and Apple Blossom White'. Those records seemed to dominate the airwaves and even Nat 'King' Cole was relegated to a back seat.

Everyone worked away quite happily while that radio was playing, most singing along at some stage. Ginger loved to listen to Slim Whitman records and would have cheerfully done all day

long. It was all new to him and a vast improvement on the rather pompous and far too formal BBC. The radio station also broadcast a commentary on the Regatta and various sporting activities involving the ship, as they occurred. Things such as football, rugby, hockey, cricket and even water polo that seemed to be forever ongoing either inter-ship, against other ships, or challenges thrown out to local communities.

But if they thought they were for an easy time now that the frantic hustle and bustle of that sea work-up was behind them, they were soon to learn that that was not to be the case. There was still a lot to do. Fearless Freddie was not one for letting the metaphoric grass grow under his feet, there was still the Queen's Birthday Parade and that was a mere two weeks away.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT MONTH

You are driving in a car at a constant speed.

On your left side is a 'drop off', (The ground is 18-24 inches below the level you are travelling on), and on your right side is a fire engine travelling at the same speed as you

In front of you is a galloping horse, which is the same size as your car and you cannot overtake it....

Behind you is a galloping zebra. Both the horse and zebra are also travelling at the same speed as you....

What must you do to safely get out of this highly dangerous situation?

Answer: *Get off the merry-go-round, you're drunk.*





GET IT RIGHT !

By Godfrey Dykes

Admirals do NOT USE R.N. after their names nor should Ratings !

WHY?

Because R.N., meaning Royal Navy, is used to differentiate between Armed Service ranks to avoid confusion and inappropriate marks of respect.

So many so-called naval published media get it wrong, and even the newly appointed President of the HMS Ganges Association in 2011, a full admiral, has been wrongly dubbed R.N. after his name and honours, as has the first listed Vice President, a rear admiral.

Whilst some ranks are unique to the Royal Navy [Lieutenant Commander, Sub Lieutenant and all Admirals and thus cause no uncertainties] others can be found in the two other Armed Service and in other UK organisations too. To avoid embarrassment to all concerned, these latter ranks have to be suitably annotated and amplified.

Take for example the title CAPTAIN. We have them in the army, the navy, the air force and the R.F.A. service. In the army, a captain is a very junior officer, but in the navy the air force and the R.F.A. service, a captain is a very senior officer. Given just the navy and the air force there is no problem in identifying who's who because the word GROUP is placed in front of captain for an air force officer. That leaves just three captain's with the same title [army, navy and R.F.A.] and so it is appropriate to add R.N. or R.F.A. behind the names of the seafaring captains, and if appropriate or necessary, the regiment behind the name of the army captain. A captain R.N. equates with a full colonel in the army and both command a mark of respect not given to a captain in the army. *See below for a pragmatic example of this very important rule.

Another example is the rank of naval COMMODORE. The air force has a commodore but his/her rank is prefixed with the word AIR, so again, no difficulties navy vis-a-vis air force. However, the Royal Fleet Auxiliary [R.F.A.] also has a commodore as do the major mercantile shipping companies. Thus the rank commodore has to be amplified, and in our case [the navy] we add R.N. behind his/her name so that there is no ambiguity or embarrassment.

Now since these very senior men and women have RN behind their names, it is appropriate that all ranks below them [below commodore] also have RN behind officers' names.

When it comes to admirals [Rear, Vice, Full and ...of the Fleet] no other Armed Service or any other UK organisation has an admiral [with the one exception of the ancient title of Admiral of



the Cinque Ports] so there is no need for an amplification.

In an environment such as NATO for example, where admirals from more than one nation meet, it would be entirely appropriate to add other amplifying data such as "the British Admiral" ... "Admiral Washington U.S.N." etc but there are no hard and fast rules for such occasions. Just seeing the word Admiral is enough to 'lay out the red carpet' and his Command Status is more important than his country.

As for ratings, the rules above apply. The obvious rules are same named SNCO and below in the three U.K. Armed Forces, and only the navy has the titles of ordinary seaman, able seaman, leading seaman, petty officer seaman, chief petty officer seaman and warrant officer seaman of whatever class. If all these titles are used correctly there is no ambiguity.

The only ambiguity is in the NATO role for example, where some titles, warrant officers specifically, are upper deck in one navy and lower deck in another and the best example of this is R.N. vis-a-vis U.S.N.. Here, a R.N. W.O. is equivalent to a Master Chief Petty Officer and not to a U.S.N. W.O. - their pay rate is OR-9 in NATO Terminology [E-9 in U.S.N. Terminology].

In other NATO navies a Royal Navy W.O.1 [OR-9] is equivalent to:

Netherlands	Italy	Germany	France	Denmark	Canada
Adjutant - Onderofficer	Capo de Prima Classe	Oberstabsbootsmann	Maitre Principal	Chefsergent	C.P.O. First Class

* I know of no example [although I am sure that there will have been] other than what follows, of a case causing embarrassment or misunderstanding by not appending the correct Force or Service to a Captain's name.

Whether one collects them or not, antiques are a part of international currency and many millions of people have at least one piece in their homes. In the furniture business [whether antique or band new] there two pieces called a DAVENPORT. The first is a sofa/bed combination piece and gets its name because the original makers were in the States, in Boston, and were called Cassons & Davenport. The second, and for our purposes the more important piece of the two, is a small writing desk, given its name because it was ordered by a British captain called Davenport in 1798 and because of the Napoleonic Wars is also known as a Campaign Desk. However, history did not record whether this officer was army or navy. Some claim 'desired knowledge' and state that it is a NAVAL PIECE, whilst others are ambivalent and choose not to take sides. A classic case of this 'claiming' is to be seen in a



London Museum called the Geffrye Museum and they make no bones about it that it is a Naval Campaign Desk.

Wouldn't it have been so much nicer if we knew for certain that such a named desk belonged to our naval history?

My parting-shot, again which Royal Navy sailors note, is that just like 'Yours sincerely', 'Yours faithfully', 'Yours truly', 'Yours affectionately' etc, the 'aye' in 'Yours aye' should always be a small letter 'a'.

Yours aye.



by Tom Simkins MBE

North Africa

On 12 November I received a message from the Marconi Company to report to the Hull depot, which I duly did, repeating the journey via New Holland ferry that I had made so many times before when attending the Technical College. I was to join the Ocean Freedom as chief radio officer and to expect my 2nd and 3rd men sometime during the following day.

After spending the night in Hull without any disturbing sirens I presented myself at the shipping office the following morning to sign on the ship's articles, and then went in search of the Ocean Freedom. I eventually found her in the dock undergoing repairs after a safe return from Archangel, which is more than can be said of other ships in that ill-fated Russian convoy, PQI7 (convoy PQ17 is described in David Irving's book Destruction of convoy PQ17). She was also taking on cargo which would be completed in Hull and Dundee later.

The ship was a nearly new American-built Liberty-type affording very spacious and well furnished accommodation and a well equipped radio room. It obviously had lots of other qualities which did not interest me at the time. Upon boarding, my natural first question was, 'Where are we going?' Nobody knew, but wherever our cargo was bound it certainly was not Russia again because all the extra fittings required for an Arctic voyage were being removed.

A few days later after the ship had moved to a berth in Hull, I and my 2nd and 3rd ROs and also a couple of the deck officers, attended a three-day gunnery course. Judging from the array of defensive weapons visible on the Freedom, this attendance was very necessary, since for my part I had never handled a gun in my life, well excluding Charlie Greens, let alone fired one in anger. Not that any of us would be expected to do so later, but all the ship's officers were expected to have a working knowledge of the armament on board, and to be able to use them should the occasion arise. When the ship sailed, there would be experienced DEMS army personnel to man and maintain the weapons.

There were four twin-barrelled Oerlikons that fired one-inch shells, and these were located around the bridge structure with an extra two mounted fore and aft. Scattered about were a number of small machine guns. On the poop was a defensive 'stern chaser', a 15-pounder. A very satisfying collection when compared with the ship operating in those Far Eastern waters did not have up to the fall of Singapore.

We were not to know of our destination until after we had joined up with the convoy. Later. However by the time we left Dundee (where we called to complete loading after leaving Hull) there was no mistaking the nature of our voyage; for now, our cargo holds below decks were packed with tins of petrol and explosives of all kinds and every inch of the decks above were jam-packed with a variety of tanks and guns and support vehicles.

During our course around the north of Scotland, there was according to my diary... enthusiasm on board as we listened to the BBC. Success after success in North Africa and Montgomery's magnificent drive west (following his successful El-Alamein campaign) chasing Rommel's army and the Italians. Tobruk and Benghazi had been re-taken and much further west, a Vichy French surrender and Dakar occupied by Allies. Over Germany, the RAF was hammering industrial targets. To top all that, the Russians were driving the Germans back out of Leningrad, taking 50,000 prisoners. In the Pacific, the Americans had dealt heavy blows on the Japanese and the Australians had advanced in New Guinea...

With such good news, I wondered if perhaps the war could be over before we got to wherever we were going, but I was so wrong. In fact three years wrong.

After one week of uncomfortable rolling round the north of Scotland due mainly to our very top heavy deck cargo and not the easterly gale that was delaying us we duly anchored between the sombre looking hills surrounding Loch Long, joining other late arrivals. Later there was the convoy conference attended by captains and chief radio officers concerning convoy discipline, tactics and communications should the convoy be attacked - but no word as to our destinations. This was still to be a secret until a certain projected date. Later that day we left the Loch after meeting up with other ships that had arrived from different anchorages about the Clyde. By the next day, all ships had assembled in lines abreast and astern from the Commodore ship (appointed at the conference). Like marching bands men all ships dressing from the one for'ard and abeam.

The speed of our convoy was to be 7.5 knots, the normal speed of the slowest vessels hence the Commodore ship maintained that speed, and all others kept station by increasing or decreasing their engine revolutions, up or down as the occasion demanded. Accurate station keeping was not only important in the event of poor visibility, it also enabled the Naval escorts to locate a particular ship speedily, and ships to recognise one another from the convoy plan on board. Complete radio silence was maintained and all inter-ship communications were made by the use of the Aldis signalling lamp which was as efficient by day as it was at night with its blue lens. During the daytime, a lot of use was made of the conventional flag hoists. In this convoy, ROs, in addition to their routine radio room watches, they also shared watches on the bridge for signalling and look-out duties. After my varied experiences to date, I found this new organised convoy existence, which I was to experience many times before the war ended, quite



exhilarating, and the view from the bridge of our fighting back ability with gun crews standing around, very satisfying.

After an uncomfortable voyage round the north of Scotland, which I didn't enjoy one little bit, the weather later as we sailed southward, changed to flat calm seas and blue-sky conditions, and so warm too. The sight of 60-odd ships all gliding along in perfect visibility during the day, and equally so in the bright moonlit nights was certainly very inspiring. I suppose it would have been also for any enemy submarines that might have been around. However, a week passed and our tranquillity lasted with only minor aircraft and submarine activity. Even later when the whole convoy waited outside the Mediterranean, twisting and turning for a whole day before orders were received as to where parts of the convoy were to proceed we experienced no problems. Then, late in the evening, we re-assembled and headed towards the Strait of Gibraltar and the Mediterranean with the friendly looking lights of neutral Spain and Tangiers twinkling in the distance.

At last we were given our sailing instructions and our destination. Except for eight ships, of which the Ocean Freedom was one, all other ships of the convoy which consisted mainly of Americans, were destined for Casablanca, Oran and Algiers.

We eight remaining British ships were to push on further east to Bone on the Algerian coast - the nearest enemy unoccupied port for the transportation of our cargoes that would be off-loaded and conveyed to the Allied armies that were thrusting their way across Tunisia. Well, at least we were not going to Malta. I wasn't anxious for our gunners to be so fully employed, although as it turned out, by the time that we left Bone, they had been kept quite busy indeed.

A note in my diary reads... 'Just a year ago the Pinna was on the way to evacuate Balikpapan in Borneo after the start of Japanese hostilities. Remembering my mixed feelings at that time as to what the future held, it seems that history is having another try. We have just learned that Bone is 30 minutes flying time from the Axis base at Cagliari on the tip of Sardinia and less from the Axis held ports of Bizerta and Tunis. Tonight the German radio broadcast news claiming that the Stuka aircraft had attacked and successfully closed the port of Bone and attacked and sunk shipping in the area....'

The Stukas did attack ships in our convoy, but none was sunk, although two ships ahead of the Ocean Freedom and one on our port side had been unlucky. As we eight ships steamed into Bone, it certainly was not closed to us. Somewhat battered, yes, but as a port certainly very operative. Considering that probably 80,000 tons of war material was about to arrive in Bone for the immediate transport by road out to their destination, it is not surprising that Axis tried to do something about it. Considering the nearness of the enemy bases and the capability of those Stuka dive bombers, our small convoy was very fortunate.

Our nights, tied up to the wharf that was littered with every type of explosive device and the many implements of war that had been discharged from the ships, were to say the least, very noisy and very worrying. Stuka after Stuka zoomed down for five or six hours every night with various intervals between 10pm and 4am, and they plastered what they planned would be the wharf, ship, and then the town, but certainly not the water which was where most of the bombs landed. While our DEMS gunners retaliated, I took refuge, along with others, whoever they were, in the lower space beneath the bridge structure, wondering if the bombs would penetrate three decks before exploding. I comforted myself with the knowledge that the petrol was all stowed in the for'ard part of the ship, and that only the explosives were beneath!

Those dive-bombing attacks continued each night right up to us leaving the port, with the exception of the Christmas 48 hours. Many times throughout the day, delayed action devices that had been dropped in the night raids would explode unexpectedly and huge water spouts would leap out of the water. The incredible thing was, that all the time that we were alongside the wharf at Bone, not one piece of war material of any consequence was lost. There was only the odd daytime raid and unloading continued uninterrupted.

It was fortunate that the low flying aircraft attacks came in from over the high ground that rose up immediately from the wharfs. It was safe for the diving aircraft because they could not be seen to be shot at by our gunners until they actually arrived, and of course, swiftly gone before the gunners got aligned on them. But at the same time, the pilots were hampered by the high ground. Consequently, when bombs were released, they overshot the wharf and the ships, and fell in the sea beyond the ships. Had the attacks been made from the seawards side it would have been different, but very dangerous for the Axis powers to risk their aircraft and pilots, which by that time they could ill-afford to lose.

Those Stuka dive bombers were equipped with banshee wailing-type sirens which became operative as the aircraft dived down. They were supposed to create a demoralising effect on strafed troops - I don't think that ships' crews liked them either. Why high level bombing on the ships and wharfs was never employed is a puzzle, well, to me.

Bone had been once a peaceful pretty little town and a curious mixture of old and new. Nice tree-lined boulevards, wine shops and pavement cafes, open spaces and a bandstand. While I was there it was just a badly damaged front line town under martial law. The Vichy French it seemed still operated the civil laws and were not exactly friendly... non-co-operation abounded. They didn't want the Allies there with their troops, and the attitude was that if we had not brought the war to Bone, they wouldn't have been in such a mess. Well I suppose they were a bit right in that respect.



Chatting with the military personnel on duty, I gleaned that a lot of very disrupting things went on seriously affecting the rapid transportation of supplies out from the docks such as catching men and locking them up on silly civil pretexts and losing keys to essential equipment. Late arrivals from other Vichy held ports like Algiers and Oran spoke of similar problems, including armed resistance against the Allied occupying troops.

On Christmas day being British we had the time-honoured British midday dinner with the compulsory line up of turkey, trimmings and Christmas pud and the 'cup-that cheers' that came mysteriously from somewhere.

Then later the Chief engineer and I went to the church on the hill where we sang 'Silent night' and two or three familiar carols. Afterwards we walked around the outside of the town. En-route, we picked pockets full of Satsuma type oranges and quite forgot that there was a war on. It seemed that the enemy did too. He left us alone for the 24 hours of the Christmas period but made up for the lapse with a really worrying daylight raid on Boxing Day afternoon.

Well, all the raids may have seemed like *raspers* to us on board, but in truth, those attacks on Bone were a mere fleabite considering the effort that was really necessary to prevent those supplies getting through to the Allied armies. At that time they were driving east to connect with General Montgomery's Eighth Army that was driving west (this was after their success at El Alamein). The Axis powers should have been strong enough to prevent a single supply ship getting anywhere near that North African coast, but they were not. By May 13th 1943, they had lost the battle.

Earlier orders that we were to load up with phosphates were cancelled, and as result, except for some ballast, we sailed empty out of Bone on the morning of December 27th just as the red sun was lighting up the red roofs and white-washed walls of the town houses. There was never a truer observation - 'distance lends enchantment'. Contrary to expectations and with all guns manned until night-fall that day, we sailed the length of the Mediterranean without a single incident and duly dropped anchor in Gibraltar harbour where it was less peaceful than being at sea. For each night the harbour resounded with exploding depth charges that were the measures taken to combat small sub-marines and skin-divers who sneaked out from the Spanish coast to stick mines on ships in the harbour.

My recollections of the town of Gibraltar are just a hazy recall of steep narrow streets, shops overflowing with goods and the ridiculous price of spirits - something like 4d a tot, and a good one at that. I would not have bothered to go ashore at all for, I was more concerned with catching up on lost sleep, but it fell on me to go ashore to take, and collect, the ship's mail, the morning after our arrival. As it turned out, that trip ashore was fortunate because I became familiar with the layout between the dock where I landed off the tender, the area, and the route into the town, which was quite a long hike along the dock road.



Later, in the evening, the captain received instruction to be ready for sea at first light the next morning. This was quite a surprise because it had been thought that we would be staying for several days, consequently most of the crew were having a well-earned whoop ashore. Because the 1st and 2nd officers had turned in and the 3rd was on anchor watch, the captain asked me to go ashore to try to round them up. This is where I was glad that I had made that trip, for the visiting tender dropped me on the dock road, but this time it was completely blacked out. Remembering that long stretch of dock road bordered by posts and droopy chains, I more or less kept one hand on them all the way to the town.

It wasn't difficult finding the venues accommodating the different crew members. The first difficulty upon making contact however, was convincing them that they had to return to the ship, the second was convincing them why they had to return and third, getting away from them, for they were in such high spirits, or rather more to the point, high with spirits. At such encounters it was repetitions along the lines of 'good old Sparks' and, or, 'Hey we've never had a drink with Sparks!', or ' Mr. Sparks doesn't mind drinking with the foc'sle and ...'hey, Fred, he wants another drink - which I didn't, but did so as a 'one for the road' then we must go. I don't think that I had ever bothered about rum before, perhaps because I didn't like it - I still don't but after the first two, or perhaps three, it became quite pleasant.

Returning to the ship I was very grateful to find those posts and chains along the pitch black dock road, and navigated on them. At some stage along the journey, I was very poorly indeed and thankful that there was a post to lean on. After I had parted with everything possible from inside me, I felt a little better and very thankful for the lines of posts stretching to where the tender would be waiting.

Upon arriving at the jetty, wharf, landing stage or whatever it was called, the tender's black shape had not arrived, which was fortunate for it gave me time to drift back to normality. It was while I was doing this drifting back that I began to wonder what was different. My first thought was that I had come to the wrong place, then I decided it wasn't the place that was different, it was me, I felt funny and certainly not 'funny ha-ha'.... Then suddenly I knew! Teeth.

It was as though I had suddenly been given an anti-alcoholic jab. I was instantly alert and put my hand up to where my four front false teeth should be for confirmation - they were not there! Just my gums that were slowly coming back to life and beginning to belong to me.

I don't know how many posts there were there must have been dozens of them along that road where I may have stopped. I searched the base of each post in turn, wishing that I had thought to bring a torch with me, instead of having to rely on my sense of touch to establish the difference between all sorts of things and my teeth. By the time I had found them, I was stone cold sober and my alcoholic remorse hurt much more than my pumping head.



Upon returning this time the tender was already waiting, and only then did it suddenly occur to me that I was back, yes, but what had I done with the shore-leave crew that I had set off to capture. The thought of going back to town and starting all over again was just as miserable a one as the thought of returning to the ship empty handed, for at that moment, I hadn't a clue as to what had transpired earlier. Then, that anonymous eye that had watched over me from the 'Pinna' to Colombo, and for all I know, in Bone too, came to my rescue. Out of the night, in the distance down the dock road, came the sounds that just had to be from boisterous tanked-up sailors whose constitutions were more tolerant to alcohol than mine.

When my thoughts drift back to 'Operation Torch' which was the code name given to those North African landings they don't latch on to that anxious and noisy experience of the Stuka dive bombers, which, in our case, made more noise than damage. Those memories have dimmed beyond recognition among my three or more years at sea. Instead, I can recall and relive instantly, those feelings of shame and misery when I allowed myself to get into such a ludicrous situation. Then the stabbing anxiety experienced, as I searched for my teeth and afterwards, water to wash them coupled with the awful thought that I might have to return to the ship, and then home, looking all gummy. Had it been a week or so earlier I could have appropriately voiced the song 'All I want for Christmas are my four front teeth'...

Operation Torch

This was the code name given to the landings of an Allied army and its equipment along the westerly North African coast. This enabled an advance to be made easterly from Algeria and Tunisia, thereby attacking the Axis forces from the west while General Alexander's army was attacking from east to west. At the onset of the landings, delays and problems ensued because of resistance at the Vichy French held ports, and hence the problems experienced at Bone too. Bone was the nearest and most forward port available to the Allies. The next ports east were Bizerta and Tunis which were in enemy hands at that time.

After the fourth day of reasonable weather off the Portuguese and Spanish coast lines, our welcome into the Bay of Biscay was intermittent sleet and snow, high winds and accompanying rough seas. Being an empty ship, well except for ballast, like the others in the convoy who were returning home empty, the Ocean Freedom rolled to such angles, port and starboard, that there was the continuous thought that 'this time she really is going over'. However, each time it seemed that she considered it shuddered and then rolled back again. Everything that was not fastened down, moved. Trying to stay in my bunk between watch periods was trying, but contemplating food, or keeping it down after bravely partaking, more so. Keeping things on the table during meals did provide a diversion requiring an extra pair of hands. So it was with a sigh of relief after clearing the north coast of Ireland, that the convoy broke up, and we headed for the Clyde, and I to my bunk, and hopefully, to be able to stay in it.



Ten days later we were safely tucked up in Sunderland docks, notwithstanding that we had sailed on the 13th and were number 13 in the coastal convoy around the north of Scotland. Here, we all wondered where our next voyage would take us and whether or not we would be able to snatch a few days shore leave. The answer came the following day. Yes, a whole ten days in which to go home and return.

Those ten days went by all too quickly, most of which was wasted in overcoming the heavy cold I had picked up just before docking - the depleting result of two weeks of sea sickness and the time travelling between the ship and home. The return journey was a particularly bad one. Bad because none of the train connections connected, consequently hours of waiting... and the weather, although improved somewhat as we docked in Sunderland, by the time I left Grimsby, it had turned deathly cold and wasn't at all conducive to waiting around on draughty platforms and travelling in cold trains. Well, perhaps they were not all so cold, it was just that I was not in the best of health as it shortly transpired. The last straw was hiking around Sunderland docks in a near blizzard, trying to find the 'Ocean Freedom' that had been moved to a different quay for loading. The next day I felt distinctly under the weather and by the next morning, more so, and as the day progressed, so did my temperature, so by the time the doctor was eventually called in, my rising temperature was nicely coming up to boiling point. I can remember the captain coming down to see me (the mountain coming down to Mohammed for the second time) and getting me to sign myself off the ship's articles in the late afternoon, and saying 'You are lucky, we are going to Murmansk and Archangel'.

I can remember refusing to go to hospital and having morbid thoughts of dying in Sunderland. I can just remember a taxi taking me to the station, but of the long journey home to Grimsby and the taxi dropping me at the door around 2pm the next day, I do not have the slightest recollection. It was six weeks before I recovered from what proved to be pneumonia - no antibiotics at that time - and my system returned to normal. By that time, the 'Ocean Freedom' would have been fitted out with the modifications to withstand and cope with the Arctic conditions, and joined that convoy bound for Russian ports. A voyage that nobody ever wanted, winter or summer. For me, Another Door, but thankfully this time, a closed one, for the 'Ocean Freedom' did not return from the Arctic - she was bombed and lost off Murmansk.

THE END



PHOTO ALBUM



circa 1955 = Jamaica - Left to Right:
Tom Clayton, Jim Copus, 'Fingers' Hands - rest unknown



The 1st Battle Squadron of the British Grand Fleet in the North Sea, April 1915. Visible are HMS Marlborough (2R), HMS Colossus (3L) and HMS Hercules (4L). Other visible ships are HMS Superb, HMS St. Vincent, HMS Collingwood and HMS Vanguard.

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)





LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

(Re missing monthly magazine)

Many thanks for that missing issue and your prompt reply. I truly can't recall seeing this issue at all. I have spent the afternoon reading through the pages and am thankful not to have missed out on it. Ron's article (Ron Clay re submarine 'Holland !') was excellent and I am so glad not to have missed it.

Well done with your work in producing these issues, Brian, also not forgetting those contributing copy. Adding to that we have a resident artist, Brian Turner in the group, we are lucky indeed. Thanks once again, **Allan Harmer**



THE END