

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

Hello Shipmates,

A visit by R.N. big brother brought up in conversation a contemporary of his from school who also joined the R.N. His name David Stanners lived in the next road so I always saw him when on leave.

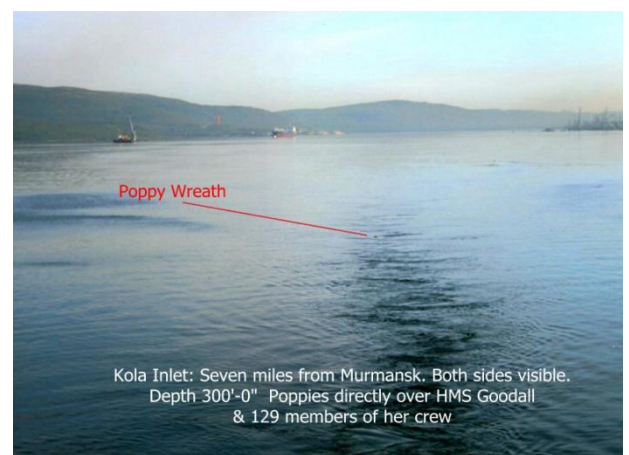
Two uncles were in the R.N. before WW2 as boy seamen, so little doubt where I was to go from elementary school. As an adult reader I feel lucky to never being old enough to have endured a 'Russian convoy', the 80th anniversary of which has just passed. The first run in 1941 was named *Operation Dervish*, thereafter numbers were the norm with an alphabet prefix to denote an 'outward' or 'homeward' bounder.

When first I joined this association a piece was written for Fred Kinsey; he was very selective, I do not recall if it got printed. It was, more or less, the tale of that school boy's trip on a Russian Convoy. At risk of boring I shall repeat the story of his demise in Kola Inlet. He served on one of those lovely 'lease lend, diesel electric' frigates, capable of crossing the Atlantic, both ways, unrefueled. None of that breaking off half way through a convoy to nip to Iceland to refuel, an affliction most U.K. vessels and escorts. Built in Boston, U.S., in July 1943 as D.E. 275 it was in R.N. service as the *Captain Class*. U.S. fit out had adequate bunks for all, a decent modern galley and mess space etc.

For R.N. service she was named *H.M.S. Goodall*, K 479, with Captain Fulton R.N.V.R. It was on its way out of Kola Inlet April 29th 1945 as escort to 'last' returning empty convoy R.A. 66, 8 miles from Murmansk, when a torpedo from U-968 hit her forward magazine; all from and including the bridge forwards perished. Kola Inlet is a fiord by another name, so very deep, *Goodall's* wreck is at 300 feet, in water of fluctuating salinity, so lousy Asdic operating conditions.

Captain Fulton's death was added to his brother's, who was killed at El Alemein, a major blow for his family when, to all intents and purposes, the war had ended. I was able to drop a poppy wreath over the exact coordinates of the remains; that information came from the R.N. museum at Portsmouth.

A lady answered my phone call, listened to the one sentence enquiry, asked why I sought the



numbers, came back in seconds with them. I would call it a very Senior Service indeed.

I dropped the wreath over those exact coordinates at 05.15 on a blazing sunny morning. Will say never be reluctant to ask Pompeii R.N. museum any question, my lady was mustard, far too slick for a government department.

On those voyages to northern Russia 1,900 R.N. crewmen were killed on 16 warships. 1,400 merchant vessels sailed for Russia of which 85 were sunk with 800 crewmen killed. Those merchantmen delivered 400,000 tonnes of trucks, planes, tanks, medicine, oil, fuel etc. The U.K. only finished paying the interest on the overall bill a VERY FEW YEARS AGO. The U.K. paid the U.S. for what was loaded, Russia paid for what arrived. Cannot help thinking why we never got round to the manufacture of a simple diesel engine for the 'war emergency build programme' of 145 Flower Class corvettes.

Another 121 were built by Canada, a fine example of emergency build and mobilisation in a short time to crew them from what was an agricultural economy. Could stretch the story to say Canada grew a large proportion of our tucker, then built and crewed the escorts to ensure it got here.

The escort engine and fuel problem that made convoy escort commodores' life a game of snakes and ladders persisted in WW2 from start to finish. If we were incapable of designing and building a decent simple diesel we could have done what Jo Stalin did, or ToJo, or Chairman Mao and copied the German designs. As a result Stalin had a far superior tank from Western designs that did not brew up at slightest hit.

I recall the Germans referred to the Sherman, the most prolific tank in the west, as Tommy Cookers. Was surprised first time I saw in the back of a Sherman to see an aircraft Radial engine, petrol of course. The decent name for 'copy' became 'reverse engineer'.

All the U.K.'s M.T.Bs, M.G.Bs were powered by high octane petrol, versions of mainly Rolls V aero engines, they brewed up as readily as Sherman's.

My first job, on leaving the R.N., was an education in that respect; in the large workshop was at least one E boat engine. The mechanic who happened to be a close neighbour with whom I got on very well, put himself out to satisfy my interest (my insatiable curiosity could be labelled as 'nosey bar steward' in some quarters). The engine was diesel, of course, and could be built up in multiples, depending on power required; crankshafts were in various lengths to allow for that, crankcase ends boltable together to accommodate. Like a host of things in my life I wish, in my dotage, I had paid more attention when young, used the camera etc. An image in my mind of those engines is the maker's name cast into crankcase, Heinkel. There happens to be, in the

U.K., an E boat under restoration by a recycler, military enthusiast. It was seen on TV when a dealer sold the restorer a working principle foc'sle gun, Mauser cannon, plus its



authentic mounting (rare as hens' teeth, worldwide) plus several other small parts. Hull was in deplorable condition, derelict perhaps a better word, but visible work looked faultless; hull of timber had steel frames. It will take countless thousands of pounds and several years to complete, but I'll wager the price of the Taj Mahal will be as a garden shed in comparison when it is; a thing I would like to see floating before my systems switch off.

We really caught it in the neck from France over, so called, A.U.S.U.S. deal for submarines. Oz currently operates six Collins Class, diesel electrics and was negotiating for twelve French designed Barracuda based diesel electrics. That the vast Pacific area is far from ideal for D. Elects was brought home to the U.K. in WW2, though I recently read of *H.M.S. Trenchant* sinking Japanese cruiser *Ashgara* in the Baltic Strait, where no great depth of easy escape route was available. A Chatham build with a Chatham crew, targets were few and far between, widely dispersed. Our T class carried most diesel but compared to the U.S.A's ocean goers were tiny with crews sleeping on false floors of tinned goods, or spare torpedo racks for reloads, hot bunking etc., unable to loiter or roam because of fuel, fresh water restrictions.



I was able to visit the *U.S. Sub. Pampanito* in San Francisco; truly amazed at available space, to see full width bunks with proper mattresses, decent mess area, galley and sample menu for all crew; they referred to them as 'pig boats'. Prior to that I had been on three of our own (visitor); short patrols in ghastly conditions was their normal life, enough to convince the U.K. designs were tailored for

'European and Mediterranean' waters, with U.S. types tailored for the vast Pacific.

France lost no time deriding the U.K. as a U.S. vassal state; so be it. I see no sin in reorganising 'what's possible'; France will shortly have its turn at E.U. presidency, bound to be their platform for renewed call to run all European military and there is nothing new in that. President Macron is a Gaullist; I recall the mood when de Gaulle expelled the western alliance H.Q. out of Fontainebleau in Paris, along with all U.S. aircraft and army types from French soil. It left the west open mouthed to be informed it was not a participant in N.A.T.O. Military Command - and is still not a member of the N.A.T.O. nuclear planning command. A learned article I came across

↑ asks "How can it be an A.U.K.U.S member with such semi-detached conduct?": Russia delights in the destruction of N.A.T.O.; know no current member of the E.U. is capable of

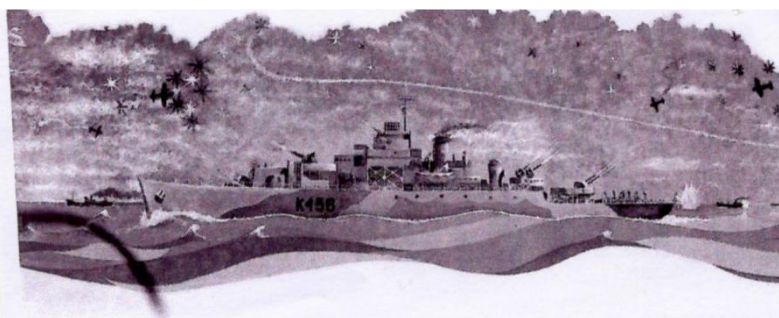
filling the void left by flight of U.S.\$ or U.K. sterling, plus hardware from both countries. During Desert Storm, when the coalition had an overall commander, General Schwarzkopf, France refused to allow him any role in their forces employment - that's how a coalition works!!!

There are four or five alliances in Asia Pacific; some have worked well for 50 years, like the so called Five Power Defence Arrangements (F.P.D.A.), a commonwealth wide agreement that takes in Malaysia and Singapore.

They are not 'the pill to cure all ills' but it makes the opposition wonder what the trigger could be if control of sea trade routes and energy are their aim. An oddity in that region is India, obviously commonwealth but, as mentioned in a previous news letter, buyer of Russian aircraft which results in their exclusion from 'aircraft technology' or 'sales of the 5th generation carried aircraft' from the U.S. A similar scene exists with nuclear submarine technology; India has long leased a nuke sub from Russia, an Akula class, and has recently agreed to lease a second, so no way will they get to share U.S. technology or operating wisdom.

Back to Oz: though going nuke are at great pains they will not carry any nuclear armaments, and no plans to exist to do so in the future. That's their stance today, by the time this reaches the readership a different balloon may have gone up.

Have just enjoyed the computer news letter thanks to Jo. Excellent cut away of Holland One, the heart sinks to see the engine made the atmosphere border on the lethal. My lamenting about not knowing about why *U.S.S. Bear* sank was comprehensively answered by Libby Saunders and accompanied by a picture of its stylish hull. Pity it did not make its goal of preservation, would have been a splendid example of Scottish ship building at that time.



Excellent feedback, is it general knowledge Libby has just had a new knee cap fitted, report of satisfaction and return to mobility with stick is good news.

You may recall my going on about wall murals and a taste for such things. Have recently come across one of Canadian frigate *H.M.C.S. Saint John*. Picture in book is only 5" long in black and white, detail bowled me over. I would just love to see it in the flesh, full colour. I am tempted to write to address mentioned in the caption to see if it still exists, maybe acquire a photo. Frigate was launched in 1943 and sank at least one U-boat, 309.



December is upon you, you do not need reminding letters to Santa should be in the post by now or his fairies (old connotation) will be pushed for time to meet your needs.

That 'star in the east', check first it's not Russian or Chinese, be assuming it's the second coming of Python's Brian. Those dastardly fiends could be running another cyber attack.

Jo and I wish y'all happy contentment, and God bless the wider families.





NOZZERS GO WEST Part 30

By Ray Lambert

He was an old hand at rigging cocktail parties by this time due to all the experience he had gained and if he were truthful he would have to admit, if somewhat grudgingly, that he had enjoyed doing it. Old Joe, the quarterdeck petty officer, allowed him a certain amount of leeway to get on with things, particularly the finishing touches. Joe also allowed him the concession of finishing half an hour early so he had time for a bath and an early tea before his four o'clock duty on the gangway. Some concession but at the same time Joe was a nice man and the gesture was appreciated, otherwise there would have been no time for tea for the gangway dogsbody.

Thanks to the kindness of the quarterdeck petty officer, Ginger had time for a leisurely bath and plenty of time for a cup of tea and a sandwich before changing into whites and heading for the gangway but this happiness was all upstaged by the officer-of-the-watch losing his telescope over the side just as the cocktail party started. That was the icing on the cake of a perfect day.

Being as it was Easter weekend and they would remain in harbour, albeit anchored off, it was naturally assumed that it would be a nice long relaxing weekend with very little, if anything, to do. But no such luck. Because having turned out everyone for all of Good Friday chipping and painting, despite having announced Sunday harbour routine, they then opened the ship to visitors for Easter Sunday and Easter Monday.

Although it had been payday the day before they entered Antigua and Ginger was now in the black again, he had no intention of going ashore. From what he had heard, it was hardly worth the effort and, to help him make up his mind there was that boat trip to get ashore to contend with. He tried to avoid boat rides to get ashore and had not bothered at Grenada, their previous port of call or Montego Bay before that but for some unknown reason Port Stanley, in the Falklands where it had been a lot colder didn't seem to have bothered him and he had grabbed the opportunity to get ashore via the motor boat just as soon as the opportunity presented itself.

There seemed to be something about the islands of Trinidad, Grenada and Antigua that failed to fire up his enthusiasm. They were tropical islands and, as far as he could tell, the locals were



friendly enough but those islands didn't stir up anything in him. Even as far as the souvenir photographs were concerned he simply bought a couple of each island and put them all together on one page in his album and titled the page 'The Islands'. That magic something and exotic atmosphere that he had felt at previous places wasn't there; he hadn't been ashore so there was no real way of knowing but somehow, within himself, he was certain. There was nothing wrong with places but they were just not for him and those feelings were reciprocated when only a hundred locals visited the ship on each of the two open days.

They bade farewell to the islands the following morning at 1100 and pointed in the direction of Bermuda, Ginger with the bulk of his money from his last payday in his pocket.

The Admiral didn't travel with them on the last leg of their spring cruise and opted to remain in Antigua, making other arrangements for returning to his Bermuda base at a later date. His cruise with the ship was over and he would return to permanent residence ashore in Hamilton although that would not be the last of him they would see. There was the real threat of 'Admiral's Inspection and Evolutions' yet to come and they knew that meant a lot of extra work for everybody, with nothing in particular to be gained.

A surface action stations helped to break up the next day and bring Bermuda even closer. The word was out that open to visitors, children's parties and all other such activities were at an end for the foreseeable future but their relief was short lived when they learned that it didn't signify they were about to have an easy time of it. There was something like a nine-week dockyard period ahead of them and that period included the Admiral's inspection, both in harbour and at sea.



The comfortable feeling usually felt as they slid gently back alongside the wall at Ireland island was tinged with a touch of apprehension this time as the uneasiness of the threatened Admiral's inspection took the edge off the warm glow felt at being 'home'

They slid back alongside the dock wall of Malabar dockyard at 1020 and almost as the mooring lines snaked out and the engines were rung off, chipping hammers, and pots of red lead paint appeared as if by magic and by the time all lines were secured and the gangways lowered into place people were already at work and the ritual chipping, scraping and wire brushing. It was a well-worn routine

that, over the previous weeks, had become so commonplace that it had evolved into a ritual. That practice continued for the next two days and didn't come to a stop until something different came to the fore, causing a halt to the routine.

Luckily Sunday came around and that signalled a break from chipping rust. But being in harbour 'with nothing to do', was not the agenda and therefore Sunday divisions was called for. Divisions on board in full whites, which seemed to go on forever with everyone being inspected very thoroughly, particularly the boys division, was then followed by a Sunday Service on the quarterdeck where all the boys were obliged to attend, except for the Roman Catholics who had their own little church right up for'ard and on the starboard side. It had always been the case whenever a church service was called for, that the boys were obliged to be there. It was doubtful if the compulsory attendance was for the boys moral welfare but more likely to swell the numbers, so as not to embarrass the parson when only a handful of faithfuls bothered to turn up. On the big occasions most of the officers would be present, sitting in the front row of seats with the Commodore, accepting it as part of their duty and to circumvent the possibility of blotting their copybook in the eyes of the hierarchy, when it came to reports or promotion time. On such occasions the Middys, who were not much better off than the boys and, in the main, were no older than the occupants of the boy's messdeck, were also expected to attend.

On this particular Sunday it was a full house with the addition of two dozen various odd bods from *HMS Mounts Bay* coming aboard to take up the spare seats. *Mounts Bay* was tied up to the wall ahead and had just returned from her own sightseeing tour that, apparently, involved quite a bit of time around Port Stanley in the Falklands. Ginger knew a couple of people on board the Bay Class frigate and he had a slight tinge of jealousy at their 'small ships' status but his envy didn't stretch as far as wishing that he could join them during their extended stay in the cold, bleak Falklands. Although he had enjoyed a run ashore there, the four days spent in the bay off Port Stanley was plenty long enough. It didn't have the same appeal as Montevideo and Rio.

The task of bringing the seats from the wardroom and other places where seats were to be had, as usual fell to the boys. Chairs with their flower-patterned covers attached had to be set out in rows in the front and others, ones without covers and from the recreation room, at the back, in readiness for the service to begin then taken back from whence they came after everyone had left. It never occurred to anyone that if they all took one chair back - the one they'd been sitting on - the whole operation would be completed in a matter of seconds. The boys had already been up early to scrub the quarterdeck planking on their hands and knees, plus polishing the brass work and wiping out the scuppers as well as tightening up the awnings and tucking away any loose ends. All this before attending divisions, getting chairs out, sitting through the church service and then taking the chairs back from where they had come.

Ginger deduced that boys did have their uses after all. They were at the beck and call of all and sundry and always ready at a moment's notice to be ordered into any of a million and one jobs that no-one else on board seemed capable of doing. Boys were quite capable of doing almost any job on board and were very often pressed into doing that very thing and usually at short notice or no notice at all. Having spent a year at *Ganges* and now with time at sea, where they had



gained 'hands-on' experience and put into practice what Ganges had taught them, they were trained seamen and capable as anyone from the seamen's messdeck, as good as any of them and better than some - but not good enough apparently, to go ashore with them or to stay ashore after 1800. A clear case of goose and gander syndrome and confirmation of the old saying: 'One law for us and another for them'.

However Fearless Freddie did condescend to some small gesture of patronisation when that evening he allowed a cinema show to be held on the quarterdeck instead of the rather warm and confined space of the rec. room.

Although chipping and scraping rust and then repainting was standard procedure and a universally accepted course of action for every naval ship entering a naval dockyard and intending to stay for more than about twenty minutes, it seemed a rather pointless exercise engaging in such shenanigans the very moment they tied up alongside back in Ireland Island, because they had nine weeks ahead of them before leaving again and, by which time it would all need doing again.

But it all became clear or at least some explanation for such behaviour became apparent when, on Thursday, it was announced that it was the Queen's Birthday and all that repainting had left the ship looking in pristine order right on cue, particularly when at colours and the ensign raising at 0800 the ship was dressed overall. Even Ginger, always the cynic, had to concede that she looked a treat. Then, the icing on the cake came at midday when a twenty-one-gun-salute was fired.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT MONTH



by Tom Simkins MBE

BENKULEN THE BOTTLENECK

I did not record, nor do I remember now, anything about that evening in Lubic Lengau. Most certainly there must have been quite a lot of worried talk, for this predicament was a new one. Hitherto we had moved from one situation to hopefully a better one. This one was different. At that moment there was nowhere else we could go, and further more, we could not go back even if we decided to do so.

Where most of the party went to in that mini mini-town, besides the ones that stayed with me in the bus, I don't know. Despite the grim situation, it didn't cause me a sleepless night - not because I wasn't worried, but I think I was becoming adjusted to 'first the good news then the bad news'. I offered my whisky to whoever it was who was next to me, but he refused it. Taking a liberal dose myself to keep off the mosquitoes again, the very next thing was, 'Wake up you lot, we are going to Benkulen..'

The voice and its cheerful intonation were backed up by Mossie's wide grin always guaranteed to chase away the blues. At that moment I hadn't a clue where Benkulen was, and I wasn't the only one, for a waking-up voice said, 'Where the hell is that?'

It was revealed later, that Mossie and two others had been to see the Resident the night before and had been told of this small port on the west coast about 85 miles away on the other side of the mountain range. Although the resident had mentioned Benkulen's existence, and yes, it was possible for our vehicle to get there, he said he would not advise it, and was very pessimistic about any ship calling at the tiny port. In addition, since the para-troop landings on February 14th, he had now heard that a large Japanese force had sailed up the Husi River and had arrived at Palembang. He also said that he did not expect it would be very long before their vehicles arrived in Lubic. Consequently it would be declared an open town. Enlarging on the brief notes I made later, the Resident's gloomy opinion was that he expected the Japanese in Lubic because of its railway station, probably in two or three days, then probably Benkulen because of its port facilities. After listening to Mossie's description of our experiences, our escape from Singapore and subsequent journey that had brought us to Lubic, the Resident was surprised that we had not taken the shorter route to Padang initially. It was the only port with shipping facilities now available. There was nothing at Benkulen. We should go north immediately by taking the narrow road north out of Lubic and join the main road near Djambi. One of the party voiced the query as to possibility of bridges and pontoons being destroyed that would prevent



us from doing so. I don't know what the answer was to that query, but later events did prove it to be a valid one.

After everyone had been rounded up, the situation was discussed at length and decided upon, on the lines that, nobody was in favour of a wearying and uncomfortable 400 miles journey to Padang - a matter of driving north towards the very hazard that we had just been moving pell mell away from. If we were lucky enough not to encounter the problems of destroyed bridges and pontoons, what did Padang have to offer was it a tiny port? nobody knew and neither could they know what the situation would be like in two or three days time. Since we were not going north, and we couldn't go south, and in view of the Resident's remark, we couldn't stay in Lubic, then it just had to be Benkulen, which substantiated Mossie's early morning remark. At least, going west we would be gaining time.... and there was hope.

We eventually set off at 9am that morning. It was the 17th February. We had been itching to get moving much earlier, but there had been a problem with one of the wheels and then some time was wasted finding the man who operated the petrol pump. It was hard to believe, that only five days ago, less a few hours, we been waiting at wharf 50 wondering who would come first, the Japanese or our passengers.

The journey to Benkulen was to have been 85 miles if we could have gone straight there but by the time we had climbed through a considerable part of the 6000 feet high Barison mountain range of steep inclines, hairpin bends, and varied surfaces it seemed much more. It was a long laborious haul and the bus whined miserably and boiled away gallons of water. It was fortunate that we had plenty of spare cans and plenty of water in the form of rivers and waterfalls

It must have been a very scenic trip, but I did not record any detail. I do remember, that just as I was beginning to think that we would never see the end of all those bends, there ahead, for a few brief moments 20 miles away, was the line of the Indian ocean sparkling in the late afternoon sun. Then later, as we freewheeled down the mountain side for the next few miles, Benkulen could be seen occasionally, a tiny cluster of dwellings nestling on the coastline.

It was a very emotional moment, as the small town became recognisable as such, far below. Instead of being a last ditch, it was as though we had set off from Pekam Baru, 500 miles ago to get there, and that we were arriving at our holiday destination. I turned to speak to the chap next to me, but changed my mind. He was gazing into the distance and his eyes were moist with emotion. I could have joined him for I did have a sort of tightness in my chest, but real emotion on my part had already been frozen up inside me on that other evening in that bombed wrecked bow of the 'Pinna'.

We rolled into Benkulen in the dimming light of the late afternoon. The setting sun was falling visibly, leaving behind an orange and purple sky. Under different circumstances the situation



would have looked enchanting in the tinted half light, a variety of buildings stretching out from the town square and a tiny Old World wharf. There were the remains of a Marlborough fort, a relic of Admiral, Lord or whatever he was when he visited the area and occupied it in the name of Britain in the 1800's. The secretary of the town Resident-cum-mayor lived in a house, or more accurately, a re-built dwelling on the site of the Marlborough temporary home. I didn't glean that information until later for there was an obelisk and plaque near the wharf, informing posterity of Marlborough's arrival and claim. However, if I had, I do not think I would have been interested, for what was decidedly more interesting and urgent, was how do we 'keep moving' having arrived in this bottleneck mini-town?

When our party representatives presented themselves to the Resident, he said that the Singapore party was not the only one to arrive in Benkulen as escapees. A party of Dutchmen from the Palembang oil installation at Pladjoe had arrived the day before, having escaped when the Japanese over-ran the area. Once again, there was the same advice that the party should 'go north to Padang'. That advice was getting to be quite a gramophone record.

It was the wrong time for him to tell us that, even if we had never heard of the suggestion before. We were travel-weary, disconsolate and in need of a wash and food. Despite his argument of the unlikelyhood of any ship calling at this tiny port, here we were, and here we were going to stay.....well, one way or another.

The Resident was quite helpful, and caring for the predicament in which we now found ourselves after the experiences so far. He found accommodation for us at a sort of hotel called the 'Oranji', and that night we fed sumptuously, actually sitting down at a table. Then later the delightful extra comfort was a bath and hot water too. After the discomforts of the journey, even the mattress on the floor later was a luxury.

We ex-'Pinna' band and Mossie had a long chat before retiring for the night, essentially, I think, to convince ourselves now that we were feeling better, that the decision we had made was the right one, notwithstanding that it was still a worrying one. We reasoned in the end that it just had to be the right one. With all that sea out there, we didn't have to be trapped, and anyway, what about all those likely blown up bridges? Tomorrow would be February 19th. The Japanese had dropped in on Palembang on the 14th and that evening we had confirming news that troops and transport had arrived there. We didn't think - remembering the Resident's remarks at Lubic - that we had any more than two or three days, perhaps four, before there could be unwelcome arrivals following our wheel marks down that mountain road. We took those thoughts to bed with us...

It was after doing so that a few hours later there was quite a to-do going on outside in the town. Loud explosions and all sorts of movements, sounds of vehicles and shouting. My immediate waking thought was 'Oh no, not so soon' which was matched by various waking



remarks around the room. Tension soon subsided as we learned that there was no panic just a scorched earth policy being put into practice, and the commotion outside was the sounds of it taking place.

Later the oil storage tanks were set on fire, and there was an exodus of cars from the town and those left behind were broken up in the town square. I have wondered since, where were the drivers and passengers going to that could be better and safer than Benkulen in the long term? At the time I wondered what urgent news had been received that had triggered off the activities. How bad was it, and where did it come from?

A few of us did a *recce*' in the morning light and a smoke laden atmosphere. The ravages of last night's activities were all around. The smashed vehicles in the square were certainly of no use to anybody now. We looked for our bus, but there was no sign of it anywhere. Although the town was very much at a standstill, I did manage to do what I had set out for which was to buy clothes, and not just curiosity. I returned looking quite respectable, plus a *topee*. I was glad to get out of the rather dirty boiler suit that I had been wearing since Bukom.

Later that morning, Sandy and John Wood returned from where they had been doing their *recce*'ing on the beach. They had seen on the deserted shoreline, a native wooden prauw not dissimilar to a Chinese junk boat. It was listing and stuck on a sandbank, just a hundred yards or so from the beach. Noel, whose tubby six-foot frame never hurried teasingly tapped me on the head and said 'Come along sonny, I'll take you to the seaside', and he was nearly out of sight before I could join him. By the time the others arrived, I was already at sea in the balloon pictures over my head. The state of the prauw, which we called 'Prow' was very off-putting but the longer I gazed at it. - with more balloon pictures of hotfooted Japanese coming down that mountain road. -the more a God-given escape vehicle the prauw became.

It was quite a large vessel, probably 30-feet long, heavily constructed with a deep hull of stout timbers, but alas, apart from being badly holed below deck, its hold was full of sea-soaked bags of tapioca. A measure of its condition, listing on a sandbank and partly submerged, was Mossie's lack of enthusiasm, back up by several others of the group who were eyeing the wreck. Eventually with everyone presumably succumbing to the same picture thoughts that I had, there was general agreement. The prauw was repairable.

Two or three of the group lost no time in seeking out the Malayan harbourmaster, who, in turn, referred them to the Resident. The upshot was, permission was given to commandeer and the operation to be treated as salvage.

Meanwhile the Dutch party referred to by the Resident upon our arrival had gone across to the 'Oranji' to find us, and by the time that everyone had arrived there, the following enlightening information had been gleaned. Seeing the prauw upon their arrival, the Dutchmen had started



negotiations with the owner of the prauw with a view to sailing with him, or acquiring the vessel by means of barter with their car topped up with cash notwithstanding that none of them had any sailing experience. Unfortunately, before a transaction could be completed, the over-enthusiastic Mayor and plus willing helpers, had included the prauw in their scorched earth activities. It had been scuttled and now lay on the sandbank with its useless cargo that had been on its way to Java, and its owner evacuated in last night's exodus.

With the return of the three who had brought back the approval of the Resident and the remainder of the party who had now all seen the prauw the situation was discussed by all present. One of the company spoke up saying that since there was nothing else to be enthusiastic about, then the prauw was the next best thing. He said, "In fact at this moment, it was the only thing - having rejected the journey back to Padang. Anyway, even if we could get transport, there wasn't any petrol now. What did everybody think" well, we agreed.

Since somebody had to be in charge, not only for the tough task ahead but also the voyage afterwards; who better than a sailor? So it was put to Mossie...would he accept? So Mossie was out of the ranks, and back with four rings again...Having accepted leadership, he made no bones about the problems ahead, it was not going to be a picnic. We had a difficult task in which everyone must be involved; not withstanding that in the end the project could be abortive. . .

Enlarging on the notes I made at the time, he said that if we were successful in making the prauw seaworthy, then after that, the voyage itself must be considered carefully by all before accepting it. Survival would be primitive, particularly as we were a mixed company. The tip of Java was about 400 miles away although we could actually sail 500 before getting there. We could be a week at sea, possibly more depending upon the wind, or rather the lack of it - which was the reason for the prauw being here in the first place.

There were more pros than cons. First on the list, pro-wise, we would be escaping from our present trapped position in Benkulen and we may meet up with another ship out at sea soon. On the other hand, the first ship sighted could be a Japanese one, when our chances of survival could be worse than staying where we were. There could be food and water problems - the latter aggravated by the intense heat. With no compass to be found either on the prauw or in the town navigation would be precarious to say the least...and so Mossie went on. However, if he was trying to talk everyone out of the venture, he didn't succeed.

So, we set to work on a plan that was worked out for the task of emptying, re-floating and repairing the prow. I was thankful, upon waking that morning, that I was feeling better. During our activities in Singapore and Bukom, and throughout our wild bus drive down Sumatra, I had been in a lot of trouble with my 'Pinna tummy'. After the discomfort I had experienced on and after leaving the 'Pinna', and after the first couple of days at the Mission, I had greatly improved despite all the hard work on the small craft up to and leaving Singapore. No doubt the



graveness of our situation promoted a mind-over-matter endurance. Whatever the problem was, I couldn't have improved it. As I had watched the terrain of Sumatra go by during that long bumpy ride, I had experienced so much discomfort that I began to worry that I may be getting worse, and that I may not 'make it' without treatment, but from where? So, after waking and feeling quite fit, the good news of the prauw had chased off a lot of the blues and I was as anxious now to get stuck into the job, as were the others.

To be able to DO something, whether or not it was likely to turn out for the best was exhilarating. By nightfall I don't think anybody was the tiniest bit exhilarated. That was lost, dead and buried in fatigue. It had been such hard work removing the 1cwt sacks of tapioca (now plus the weight of the water) out of the cargo hold and sloshing about in ankle deep, to waist deep in water. One half of the body experiencing tepid cool water and the other half scorched by the sun. (Benkulen is just below the equator)

It was so hot and smelly inside the hold that it was impossible to work there for more than five minutes at a time. So it had been arranged that tasks be separated by rota so that helpers lifting up, pushing out, dragging, emptying or resting in turns be done with maximum efficiency to avoid anyone flopping out from exhaustion. I found that particularly beneficial since it gave me the chance to take a bit of time off without appearing to be dodging the column so to speak. Since I didn't know what was wrong inside me it was hard to decide whether activity should be avoided particularly as the pain could develop when I was at rest!

Sometime we learned later during the afternoon we had visitors; a party of Dutch soldiers arrived (actually we learned later they were Marines who had escaped from Palembang after losing their ship), and like us, they were seeking an escape facility. It was explained to one of the three officers, replying to their query, how we had arrived, what we were doing and intended doing if we managed to make the prauw seaworthy. The officer asked if they could come with us if we were successful. Courtesy now demanded that the question be put to Mossie - now Captain Moss! He of course agreed, but when the officer said that their party included 25 more men, he retracted saying that we already had too many passengers and crew. I did not record all that transpired, but it was on the lines that, what was important, was that even if all the marines could be squashed in, military personnel on board would make subterfuge and survival impossible should we be sighted by the Japanese. The officer suggested that just the three of them might come, to which Mossie agreed, provided that they were suitably dressed. Replying to the question, Mossie said that we hoped to sail the next day, but more likely the following one.

Throughout the rest of the day, a bevy of marine soldiers stationed themselves near the jetty with a mounted machine gun and slung automatic weapons. It seemed as though someone was making sure that we did not sail prematurely, although a voice said calming troubled waters -



'Perhaps they have been put there to protect us. Just before dusk, they departed. Also that afternoon there was the roar of an aircraft. It flew over us and our first reaction was duck, hide or run for cover, but then, almost immediately the aircraft was seen to be a Netherlands flying boat, a Sunderland. There wasn't any wing wagging, circling, or waving to show that we had been seen. It just disappeared to the Southeast.

By the late afternoon we had the prauw looking quite shipshape, but we had to get a move on. Not because of circumstances, important though they were, but because the high tide was just round about sunset, probably 5pm. It was our only chance to float the prauw without waiting another day on the sandbank. During the exertions of the afternoon, there was the lighter side. A lot of the townsfolk had been sitting on the beach and jetty and watching us with great interest - in fact, amusement....tuans working! The children were having a whale of a time. It seemed as though half of the town had turned out, just to see the tuans working, and in all that heat too!

Nevertheless, the best moment was yet to come. Our procedure for getting rid of the tapioca, after a sack had been man-handled from below deck, was to drag it along the deck to a convenient position, then, with it half-over the gunwales, slit the bag to let the contents cascade into the sea. As the tide began to rise, one of the resting 'tuans' decided to paddle-cum-wade round the prauw from stem to stern just at the right moment to receive a hundredweight of wet tapioca all over him. The result on the beach was absolutely electric. If there had been any aisles our spectators would most surely have rolled in them. The chaps who had slit the bag enjoyed it too. As somebody said later, that incident would be remembered long after the Japanese invasion had been forgotten. (That 'somebody' must have known that the Japanese would be defeated)

As the tide started to rise in the late afternoon, the prauw was showing signs of floating....then, no signs of floating. We hauled on ropes and levered with poles to no effect until it was discovered that holes which had been above the water when the prauw had been listing, were now below it and letting in the sea.

While we were working hard to lever the prauw, there came frantic shouts from the beach. It was a Dutchman, absolutely beside himself, and waving frantically. Where he had come from, we had no idea and he certainly was not one from our Dutch. Then suddenly he was shouting, and stumbling over his words that he had a wife and children in Java, and for pity's sake, would we him with us. Thinking that we were actually going, he came splashing through the water between the beach and the sandbank.

Although he was told that we were not leaving and had yet to float the boat he didn't catch on. His ears must have received the message but it seemed his brain could not interpret. He became more frantic when we renewed our efforts with the poles and thinking we were pushing



off and about to leave he began pleading again in a most desperate way to let him come aboard. So we let him. He sat down looking as though he was about to have a heart attack. He could speak English but it seemed that although he could hear he could not understand a word that was said even when addressed by a Dutchman who went and sat beside him. I wondered what could have happened to him before arriving in Benkulen that had left him in that zombie state.

At 4pm. picking up their guns, the soldiers departed. By 6.15 the prauw was afloat and it was now dark and by 7.15 we had her alongside the primitive little jetty. She looked good as though having sailed in and tied up and was waiting for her master to return. That was the rather poetic observation I made at the time.

We all trooped back to the "Oranji" leaving behind two volunteer guards on watch. not only over our handiwork, but also on the 'flying Dutchman' for that is what we had called our somewhat disoriented guest who refused to move from his original position on top of a hatch. It is interesting to reflect on life and circumstances and the way things affect one and why. I dropped into my bed on the floor that night absolutely weary. All I could think of beforehand while consuming the evening meal which was sparse and worse than the previous night was getting there and sinking into oblivion. But I could not. The oblivion from which one wakes up refreshed and unaware of the passage of time would not come. Our 'Flying Dutchmen' would not keep away with my thoughts. He invaded what would have been my oblivious ones which then resulted in dreams that were just partly dreams and partly waking thoughts. These led me on to fantasising ones what might have been his experiences prior to boarding the prauw.... then complete wakefulness.

It was 5 am. I went outside and stood on the veranda and looked across the mini-town with its drifting smoke. It was quiet and not even the sound of the distant waves. I wanted to enjoy the cool peacefulness of the morning, but that restless night was still hanging around me like heavy cloak.

Later, as the sky lightened with the advent of dawn, I walked down to the beach. Our two watchers were sleepily sitting on the jetty with their charge still safely floating, tied up behind them. On it, silhouetted against the sky, the cause of my restless night of dreams, was still sitting bolt upright in the stern, as though he had never moved since the afternoon before.

Later still that morning, Mossie called a meeting in his capacity as leader. He wanted to make sure that everyone was fully aware, without any illusion, as to the hardships and possible dangers to be endured during our projected journey - particularly the heat and complete lack of any individual privacy, and so on. After much discourse, he concluded with, 'We will not have a single life jacket on board'. Every one was prepared to take the risk, but later, just before sailing time, six of the Tuans who had given us as much support as they could declined the voyage, leaving now a full complement of passengers and crew of 35.



After the business had been settled, we discussed strategy should we be sighted by the enemy, and how we should dress in order to look as indigenous as possible well from a distance.

Sailing time was fixed for as soon as we could get a load of food and water aboard and attend to the rigging. Before we broke up for the night, and how it was promoted I don't know, but a small service was held, and one of the party was invited to read a passage from the hotel bible. Unbelievable though it may seem although it was opened at random, the passage selected included the words ...' and the dangers that encompass us and deliver us from our enemies'.

The next morning, February 19th, acquired food stores were loaded aboard. Some of the drier sacks of tapioca had been left on board as ballast and to provide stowage and a sitting area around the keel shape of the hull. Somebody had discovered dozens of one gallon and half gallon earthenware jars in the town and these were washed, filled with water and stowed away. By the time that all had participated in these chores which included the many visits in and out of the town, in particular, filling and lugging the heavy water jars, we were all very hot and tired, so it didn't help a bit to have the marines back with their mounted artillery, watching us to-ing and fro-ing like spectators at the tennis match.

We had finished our work by the late afternoon, and just as the crew were familiarising themselves with the sail and rigging the marines stood up, weapons at the ready as their officer came down to the jetty, followed by the Resident. Gone was the officer's hitherto friendly approach, for after eyeing us all for five or six seconds, he demanded to know who was in charge. Obviously he had a memory problem for Mossie was standing right in front of him. Matching the situation Mossie said 'I am Captain Moss, what is the problem?' 'I want everyone off this vessel; it is now commandeered in the name of the Dutch Navy. (He may have said Netherlands Navy I can't remember) If you are not prepared to accept the order it will be taken by force...."

The last bit was quite a laugh, if the situation could be called laughable. How could we resist with such a one sided share out of weapons? .. Mossie said later, that for the first two or three seconds, he was prepared to laugh - thinking it was a joke because we had been laughing and joking a few minutes previously and was slow in taking the smile off his face. Then the situation hit him like a brick, and quoting his actual words, 'I was absolutely speechless; how could those men have been so bloody rotten as to sit around like they did, watching us work so hard and then pinch our labours and our only means of escape..... '

As we started to evacuate, the final message was, 'Everything must remain on board. Just leave with your personal possessions'(actually he said 'lessons' and then corrected himself), so we did. I wrote later, '.....it had been very oppressive and dull all afternoon and the sky to the east and over the mountain range, had been getting increasingly black with clouds. Now, behind us, a dull red sun was dipping towards the sea, and, over the town, black smoke was spreading - the



results of renewed demolitions. It seemed as though the whole aspect had been especially synchronised to be in keeping with our feelings. Nobody wanted to see the prauw sail away.... 'red sails in the sunset' ...At the 'Oranji' it was too late for tea and too early for the evening meal, so we just flopped down in the dining room-cum lounge. George walked over to the ancient wind-up gramophone in the corner and set it going - after he had sorted his way through a pile of '78's. It was Richard Tauber singing 'My Little Grey Home in the West' .I could have murdered him....'

I suppose that if I say 'I' it no doubt refers to 'we'. I felt utterly miserable and weary. When in decent physical condition, it is easier to take the knocks that fate has to hand out, but being in the state that we were, that afternoon's experience was hard to swallow. There was very little chat. Unless that miracle KLM Company boat turned up (there had been - probably wishful thinking - rumours) we had just lost our means of escape. Nearly an hour later, Mossie turned up. It was his face round the door that we saw first, with 'guess what?', then walking in everybody upright. 'Well, there is some good news' we all remained sitting like ramrods. 'Yes' he said. 'I watched her sail out; she looked fine, she went straight out and then tacked south. Our Dutchman got away. He went splashing out into the water shouting his head off and the soldiers hauled him on board. As Mossie walked in and then rested on the back of the chair, he continued, 'She really looked fine. We did a good job'. Straightening up he offered a smile and secretive wink to all, and left.

Eventually the gathering broke up, some disappeared, and some went to the tiny bar although they were not likely to get much there for we had been told that morning that it would be emptied in anticipation of a Japanese arrival.

Later as the lounge emptied, we 'crew'. went upstairs where we found Mossie in a small room. As we entered he spoke first, obviously to scotch any gloom, along the lines that he had just been thinking how lucky we had been having travelled so far without any scratches and nobody missing. That started us recalling the many occasions when luck or was it providence was on our side, in particular that we had taken the northern route from Kepel. Somebody said 'If we had hit that minefield we could have been enjoying heaven now'. which went down rather flat, and somebody else wondered where had the army officer on the road to Lubic obtained his information about the Japanese attacks on the ships that had taken the southern route from Singapore. Thinking that perhaps the chat might go in the direction of our present plight, I went down and collected my last bottle of whisky, as I returned, Mossie said 'snap', he had already put one down on the table. After few light hearted jibes about being secret drinkers and hiding our booze, etc., someone said, 'lets have a party', so we did.

Later when it was appropriate, I asked Mossie 'what was all that smiling about when you came in downstairs?'



'Me?' he said, 'smiling? .. 'I wasn't smiling I was breaking my bloody heart, that's what"

Later, after dinner which was more like a snack, for supplies in the 'Oranji' were running low (or perhaps they were being reserved for an uncertain future) Mossie said he had an appointment with the Resident and left us.

When he returned he told us what had transpired. Apparently the three Dutch marines officers had not been very happy about sailing away with us and leaving the men behind, and less so, trying to take everybody. They had consulted the Resident and he gave them the same advice as he gave to us upon our arrival - to go north to Padang. While the officers made up their minds, they had put the armed guard on the jetty, as we know. Then later in the afternoon they decided to take the Resident's advice, so collecting their men they set off north for Padang in their vehicles - and that was when we saw the men depart with their armament. Half way through the night they were stopped by a demolished bridge. They then made a wide detour only to find a pontoon ferry also demolished, so they had no alternative but to return to Benkulen. Therefore, presumably while the officers caught up with some sleep, the beach party was back in position where we saw them that morning.

At that point we tossed the situation amongst ourselves with a certain amount of satisfaction because what had happened to the marines is what would have happened to us had we followed the Resident's advice and set off north.

Mossie went on. When they returned that morning, having had to leave one vehicle behind because they had used up all their spare fuel, they reported back to the Resident and then departed. Mossie had asked him why it was that from morning until late afternoon, we were allowed to work so hard without any assistance from the men who had already decided that they were going to take the prauw. The reply was that the officer in charge returned to him only at 4pm with the information that he was going to commandeer the prauw legally in the name of the Netherlands Navy, and that the Navy had priority over any civilian evacuation.

I had another disturbing night, not from things that went bump in it or demolition activities, but from the problem that was lurking in my middle. For, whatever it was that was lurking in there, it had not liked the day's exertions and now in my relaxed state it was protesting now that the anaesthetising effect of the party had worn off. I lay awake listening to the deep breathing of my room mates, and in particular, Sandy, who intrepid he might have been few days ago at Benkalis had made a bit of a nuisance of himself after two or three whiskies. I wished that I could have been asleep also and oblivious to our trapped situation.

Outside the 'Oranji', what had been demolition the night before was now the noise of the thunderstorm that had been working itself up to a big one since the late afternoon. I wondered how the commandeers of the prauw were getting on.



In the morning light, we ex 'Pinna' band and Mossie assembled in his room again. Firstly from choice, but secondly from the situation that had arisen, that somehow, we 'common sailors' were not compatible with tuans and pukka sahibs - unless it was that our passengers were all friends together and we were strangers. Putting it to Mossie as to why there seemed to be two camps, he said that it's a pity we couldn't be just leaving wharf 50 that way we would soon have known who wanted to be in which camp.

We talked. Whether we now wanted to or not, we couldn't go to Padang, or anywhere for that matter for there was no petrol in the town. Even if there had been, we did not have a bus to put it in and what was more we would never get passed the demolished bridges.

That was not the only depressing situation. If we were to believe local news which common sense suggested that we should a Japanese advance party had arrived in Lahat a few miles to the east of Benkulen two days ago, and also later in Pagaralen. We really had to start thinking fast. There just had to be something we could do if we were to avoid internment - or worse.

There was another problem, food. All our stocks of food except for a small amount had gone off with the prau and now the 'Oranji' was not going to guarantee being able to feed us any more after that day. There was only one answer to that.... to go. There was still only one way to go and that was out to sea. But how? . .

So while we placed our dwindling hopes on the possibility of that -wishful thinking? - KLM boat arriving, it was decided that we would search the beaches for anything that would float. (As sailors, it would seem that it was thought that any thing that would float was far better than being on land, !) Well, we did and came up with four small two-man catamarans which looked as though they may have been abandoned - they were in a rather sad state so we decided that we would acquire them. Upon closer inspection it was found that one was beyond repair, but the other three could be made seaworthy.

Looking back now, the idea of going out to sea in them with the hope of intercepting one of those ships that had been just smoke on the horizon, seems a bit mad but it was very real at the time. The idea was that if we were picked up, we would hope to bring back help for the others. We didn't talk about the alternative situation. Those left behind would arrange for three smoke signals in a row to be lit if the Japanese were seen heading towards the town.'Mossie had another idea. While work was in progress on the catamarans, he asked if I could make a transmitter I said that obviously, given the right bits and pieces, I could, thanks to my hitherto impecunious radio-ham days.

Meanwhile, while we had been busy, there had been another development a party of 20 or 30 RAF chaps had arrived. I didn't ask, but I did think that they could have been the ones in the

vehicle that had shot past us going north on the day that we learned that Palembang had been overrun. I did overhear that they had arrived in Benkulen from the North

I wasn't around to hear the precise arrangements, but I gathered they would organise two parties; one would go 10 miles back - they held the necessary armament-and hold the mountain pass against any approaching Japanese. If a ship was seen to be approaching, they were to be alerted. Meanwhile the remaining party would police the town against any eventuality. If a ship arrived, then if necessary, they would commandeer it and ensure that everyone got on board

Well, that arrangement savoured of a far better gesture than that of the Dutch marines who were only thinking of themselves. Later, the Resident, Mossie and I went to the now deserted Posts and Telegraphs building, but there wasn't anything there to be had. I suggested we break into a radio/electrical shop but the Resident said "No, we are still a democratic country you know' but after consideration he changed his mind and we eventually acquired some radio sets that could be dismantled for components; some chassis-making material. insulating material, wire and essentially, a meter and a soldiering iron. I worked for the rest of the day and all night and by early morning I had a primitive-looking but reasonable little transmitter assembled powered by a couple of receivers power supplies connected in series giving me about 350V. This I felt would provide for enough transmitting power in the HF band with which I was familiar, and with the fixed stations frequencies. I thought, how simple it would be if I could call up a ship on 500kc/s, but not only would that have been unwise, but I wasn't able to receive on 500kc/s anyway since none of the all-wave receivers covered that band. In fact, as the night wore on, or rather the early morning, I was thinking more soberly about the use of the transmitter at all - assuming I could make it work.

When Mossie had the bright idea, don't suppose his immediate thoughts, any more than mine, got past the enterprising constructional part of the idea a clutch at a straw. Instead of being soft headed with Boy Scout thoughts, I should have used my intelligence and drawn Mossie's attention to the fact that if he thought all I had to do, having made the equipment, was to call up somebody on MF and say 'Please come and pick up civilians and RAF personnel from Benkulen, it could hardly be done without inviting the Japanese Navy, and probably their airforce as well. Even using the HF bands, which I was planning to do, without being able to code a message would also be very risky. In fact, quite mad!

Well, having nearly completed the easy parts of the transmitter amplifying circuit and having 'suped-up' the I.F. stage of the broadcast receiver so that I could receive and monitor my own Morse signals, I knew that I would need another day to wind an oscillator coil and make it oscillate. That would be the difficult part.

Whether it was because of the dismal thoughts I had been having because of my misguided enthusiasm that had festered during the night hours, or whether it was because it was 5am and



I was tired, the effect was the same. I downed tools. Looking back as I closed the workshop door, I felt a bit sad, for really I had been enjoying myself, as though I had been in my shack at home experimenting with enthusiasm when tomorrow would have been another carefree day.

Walking back to the "Oranji", the first signs of dawn were creeping into the eastern sky and in the narrow street there was the acrid smell of demolition in the pockets of smoke that hung about.

The previous day and before I had set about my task, Mossie had said that he had heard the rumour circulating again, reputedly originating from the Resident's office, that there was still the chance that the KLM boat might arrive. So, on the strength of that 'straw', and while I had pressed on with my project, volunteers had taken it in turns to keep watch throughout the night for any signs of a vessel on the skyline, or approaching, so that the RAF boys could be alerted. Some flares had been found which were to be set off at intervals during the night and into the morning, but in retrospect, I am surprised this action was not considered foolhardy. If there had been a sighting, what nationality might it have been?.. Moreover, if the Japanese had arrived in Mana, what would they have thought about flares in the night sky?

It was on the previous night that Mana, a town somewhere down the coast south of Benkulen, had been mentioned. Noel Green and Sandy had been chatting with the 'Oranji' proprietor. Sandy's opinion was that all those rumours, Pegerallem, Lahat and now Mana. were just rumours and that was all, and 'Do they no have any bloody telephones in Sumatra, and if they no av'em, where did the KLM boat rubbish come from?'

It didn't help not to know, one way or the other. Even rumours were comforting and better than no rumours at all.

At 7am, someone was shaking me. He had just come from the beach; smoke had been seen on the horizon. We both chased down to the jetty, and sure enough, there was smoke. Which way was it going? . . . An hour later there was a mast, then half an hour later again, a whole mast and funnel as a ship sailed in our direction. There was no doubt about it.

Before the KLM boat the "Kheong Hwa" dropped anchor off-shore, The RAF had been alerted and had returned from the pass. Somebody paddled out in one of our repaired catamarans, and shortly afterwards, a motor boat was lowered from the 'Kheong' and this was used as a ferry twixt ship and shore. Everybody in the town was given the opportunity to be evacuated if they wished, although very few of the remaining town inhabitants that were left after the exodus a couple of nights previously, took advantage of the offer. Neither did the Resident, for I did not see him, or his secretary among the evacuees.

Irony of ironies! After the days of working on the prow and then the catamarans, and the suspense, wondering if a ship would arrive, then the all-night vigil and the unnecessary work on



the transmitter, another vessel steamed in and then anchored next to the 'Kheong' . She was the HMS 'Pengar' , an ex-passenger-cargo boat of about a 1000 tons, now managed by the RNVR. Both vessels sailed out just before noon the naval ship, one might say, acting as escort, although she was not very capable of providing protection if it came to a fight.

As I sat on the deck of the 'Kheong' and watched Benkulen slowly disappearing out of sight at the end of our foamy wake, I experienced quite a nostalgic feeling of loss, like losing a friend. The memory of all that worrying and anxious waiting, fruitless hard work on the prauw and subsequent disappointment was already dimming. Instead, my mind latched on to that warm feeling of relief that I had experienced as the town came into sight on that first evening. It was just like when we freewheeled down the mountain, trouble had been abandoned behind us, and ahead lay hope.

Well, as it turned out hope plus reality had lain ahead. Once more, we need not have worried, for nothing bad had happened. We could have sat back and enjoyed a well earned rest. Done some idle swimming, explored the town and area, and taken advantage of any amenities available. Then, today, walked leisurely down to the beach and boarded our ship! However, if everybody possessed a crystal ball could we still be happy? We would also know when our doors were going to close too! Later that day, and I am puzzled why it came about that we did not board her in Benkulen, we British civilians were transferred to the 'Pengar" and the two ships parted company. The Dutch ship destined for Tjilijap on the south coast of Java, and the "Pengar" to Batavia (now Jakarta) on the North coast.

-- **Next: Another Door Part 7: Another Wrong Island The main objective being taking Batavia and the docks at Tanjong Priok.**

The very first time a miracle
has been captured on camera !



A PRESSURISED JOB



By Ron Clay

There was an article in last month's magazine about the submarine *Holland 1* which rang a bell.

I served my time in the Navy as an M (E) and was on the *Superb* between October, 1955 and March, 1957. After completing my time in the *Andrew* I returned to my original trade with British Rail and passed my Board of Trade Certification to be a steam train engine driver, just a boyhood ambition; following that I left British Rail and secured a works engineers position for a petroleum company for 10 years and then left there to work as a contracts manager for a High Pressure Water Jetting Company called *Waterblast Ltd*.

Our machines used very high pressures to clean off debris from buildings, ship's hulls and tanks and also had the ability to cut through huge amounts of concrete on bridges and many other structures.

It was in April 1981 while I was working in the UK. as a manager for this company that the sunken submarine *Holland 1* was discovered by the Mine Hunter *HMS Bossington* who was out in the English Channel conducting some exercises.

There, deep below the waters beside the Eddystone lighthouse, she was nicely settled on the seabed at a depth of 63 metres. Within hours the navy diving vessel *HMS Seaforth Clansman* was on site and lowered a diving bell complete with cameras and accompanied by a deep water diving team and confirmed this to be the submarine *Holland 1*. A flag was then attached to the submarine for identification purposes and as an indication to other underwater explorers that the vessel was claimed by the Ministry of Defence.

Commander Richard Compton-Hall, who was the Curator of the Submarine Museum, got in touch with our firm 'Waterblast' and enquired about our big jetting machines. Our company arranged the meeting and we discussed the pros and cons of cleaning the boat.

You must remember that at this time the *Holland* was still at the bottom of the sea and so there were many things to consider. The hull was heavily encrusted with marine life and old wire cables and fishing nets intermingled and tangled with the rusting steel.



Being the manager of the 'Cleaning Team' I was involved in the negotiations and the Commander asked me to accompany him in the diving bell to view the state of the boat prior to it being lifted. That was an opportunity not to be missed but unfortunately I was heavily involved in several other projects I couldn't find the time to go with him.

Anyway the contract between my company and the Submarine Museum was agreed and in September, 1982 the 'Wild Duck' Class Boom Defence vessel *RMA5 Pintail* based in Plymouth was commissioned to bring the wreck to the surface.

Because of the foreseen problems of then exposing the boat to air which might have resulted in the rapid degradation of the metal (bearing in mind that she had spent the last 70 years nestled in the mud) I suggested that it would be to everyone's advantage if it could be brought home, so to speak, still submerged. And that is in fact what happened; the *Pintail* lifted the *Holland* clear of the seabed and carried it still submerged into Devonport.



She was placed carefully into the flooded number 12 dock and the heavy machinery slowly lowered her into the dock with the divers already below the surface making sure she sat comfortably in the wooden chocks on the dock bottom.



Commander Compton-Hall, his wife, together with a crowd of onlookers, and I watched as the water drained from the dock and the first thing to appear was the red ensign which the original divers had attached to the wrong end of the boat and caused us some amusement. But there, for all of us to see - and especially for Commander Compton-Hall was the realisation of his

dream finally come true and in all its glory.

Once the dock had been completely drained I climbed down the conning tower with Commander Compton-Hall and we were the first people to enter the boat since the early 1900s. Divers had already been inside (whilst she was lying on the seabed). I had some trepidation as to what we were going to discover within the hull but there was no evidence of human remains. What did meet our eyes, however, was layer upon layer of mud but together we managed to get along inside as far as the torpedo tube.

I had a small hammer with me in my tool kit and by tapping on the torpedo hatch managed to open it for the first time in years surprisingly easily as it was all gun-metal. The divers had already told me that there was a fascinating insight to the Victorian heads installed beside the torpedo tube. It was a hand-pumped Royal Doulton (No. 612) porcelain toilet easily visible and obviously with an unprotected view during use from other crewmen in its day. This absolutely intrigued the television and newspaper crews who were present and their focus seemed to centre on this artefact. We did our best to restore the loo to its former glory but it didn't come up too well.



We had to tread carefully because the power of our water jets can, as I said earlier, slice through hardened concrete; but with perseverance and a great deal of skill we slowly but surely took away the sea life, the rust and the Pusser's paint remaining on the hull and managed to reveal the bare steel which was in a good condition

The sub had sunk whilst it was being towed to be broken up and probably the reason for the sinking was due to the fact that the valves and other watertight items used had been removed to be used in other submarines already under



construction. In place of these metal fittings wooden bungs had been put in which hadn't helped its ability to withstand the prevailing sea conditions and thus blew out during the voyage.

As you may imagine we had to work quickly and the whole cleaning operation took quite a few hours as we had to work throughout the rest of the day and night so that the exposure of the hull to fresh air wouldn't have too much chance of corroding the metal more than necessary.

The two large holes in the hull were down by the battery area where the leaking battery acid had eaten through.

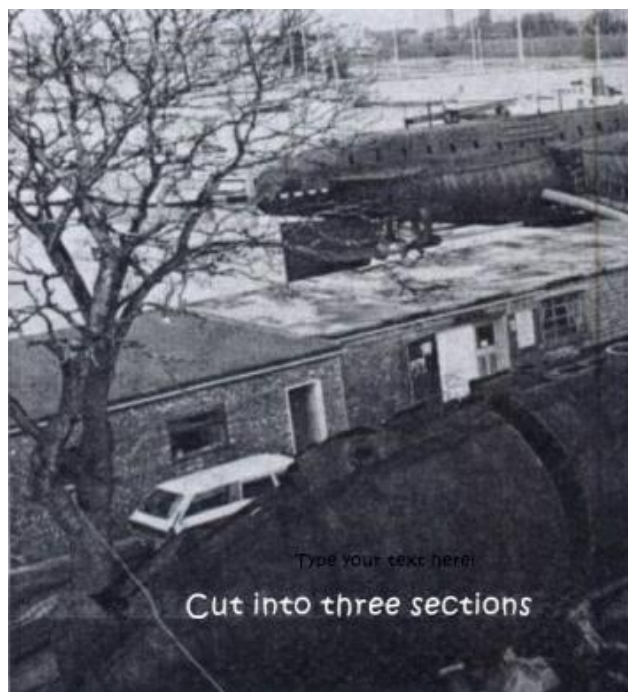
The next problem was how to take it around to Gosport and I was involved in the discussion where it was thought best to cut the boat into three separate parts. I didn't think that this was a good idea as when my team had finished it the boat looked splendid and gleamed attractively. Commander Compton-Hall asked me if we could clean up the engine as he thought there might be a chance of running it again but I said although we could clean it up there was no chance of it working. Well, we used our hoses and did in fact clean the whole of the interior removing tons of mud and grease and rubble until it all looked almost as good as new. The petrol engine, being made of cast iron, hadn't the strength to stand up to water blasting and broke apart.

Anyway the decision was made to cut her in three and she was transported on three army tank low loaders to Gosport where it was eventually re-assembled and coated with a product called Fertan which was supposed to but in fact didn't do the job of preserving the metal.

After a while I was invited to the Metallurgy & Materials Society in London to give a talk with photographic slides to various manufacturers - that is parties involved in the degradation of metals and paint and the like as it was a mystery as to how and why the steel structure was in such good condition having being in the sea for such a long time.

The final conclusion was obviously the lack of oxygen; the boat being in the mud and sand and helping her to survive, plus without any doubt, the amount of many, many layers of Pusser's lead paint that had been applied both inside and out which certainly helped to preserve her.

Perhaps proving once again the old navel adage. **If it moves salute it - IF IT DON'T MOVE - PAINT IT !**



Just to conclude; *Holland 1* is now welded together in its own building looking pristine as ever for the public to view inside and out at the Submarine Museum, Gosport.



An interesting episode in my life which was all brought back after reading last month's article in the magazine.

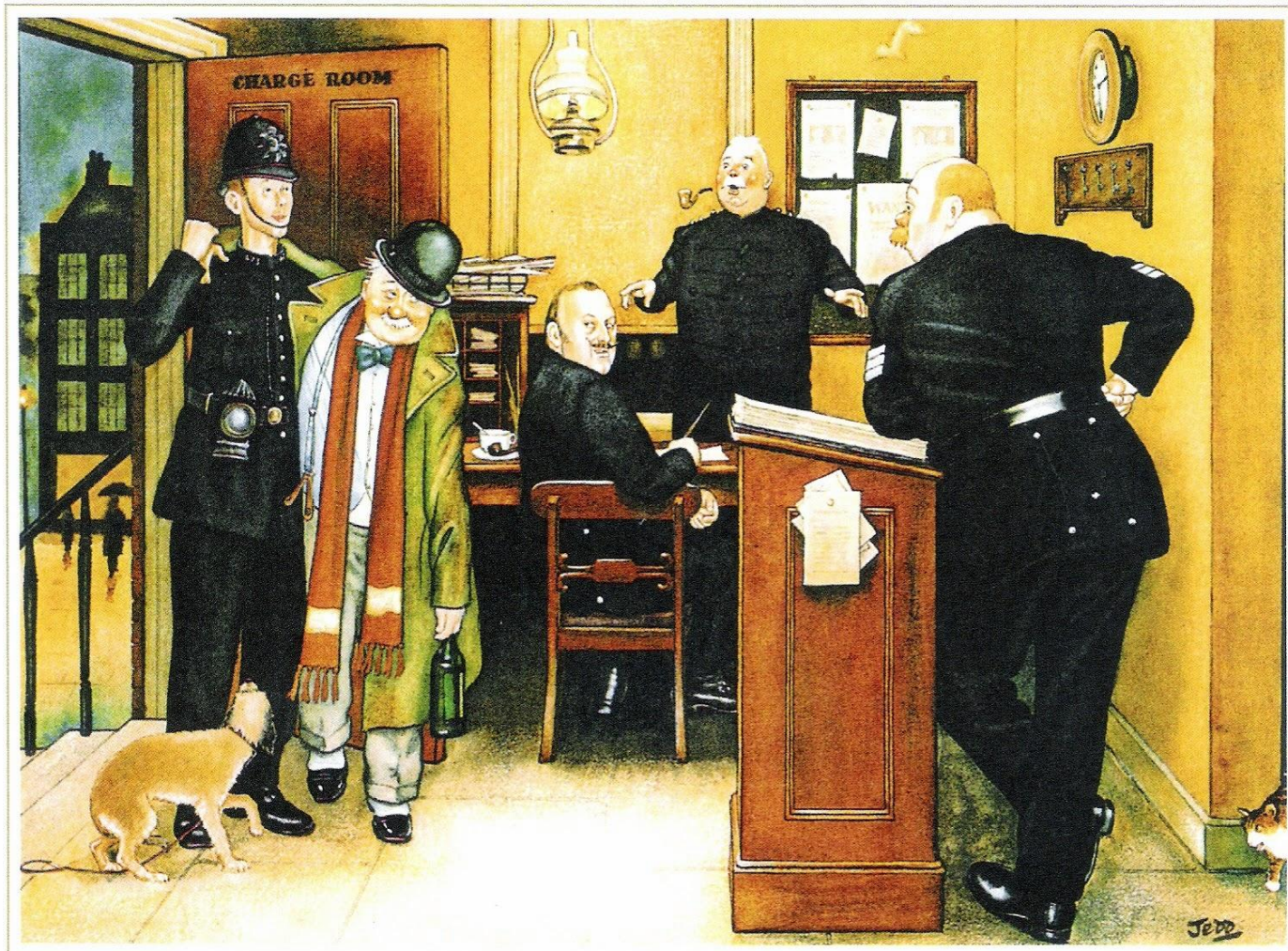
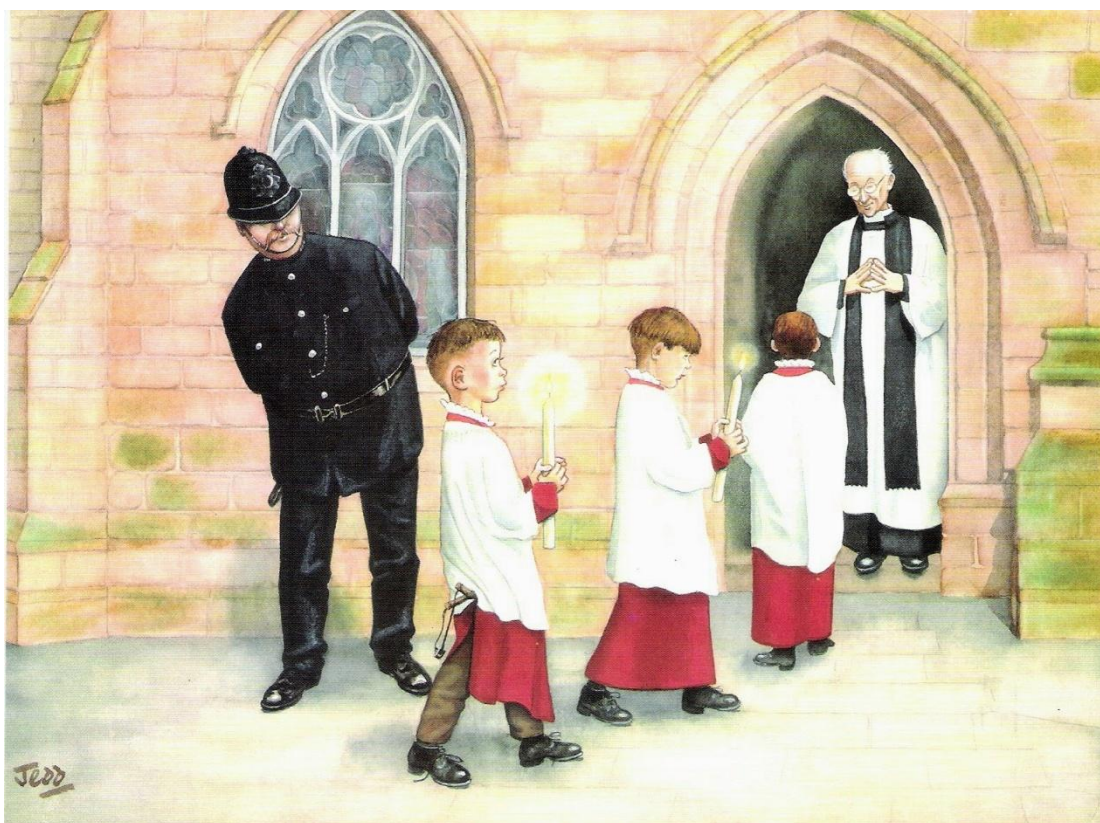


PHOTO ALBUM



Marine George Robertshaw (HMS Superb) with cigarette Christmas Day early 1900s



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)

Harry Armstrong a Royal Marine on 14 November, 2021 - Harry was on board in the early days between 1946 & 1948





THE END