

# H.M.S. SUPERB (CRUISER) ASSOCIATION

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**CHAIRMAN OF THE ASSOCIATION, BRIAN SAUNDERS**

# CONTENTS

Andy's Musings

[Click Here to Go There](#)

Letters to the Editor

[Click Here to Go There](#)

Nozzers Go West

[Click Here to Go There](#)

Give My Regards to Broadway

[Click Here to Go There](#)

Back in '56

[Click Here to Go There](#)

Another Door

[Click here to Go There](#)

Photo Album

[Click Here to Go There](#)

Slops

[Click Here to Go There](#)

Crossed the Bar

[Click Here to Go There](#)

People Searching for People

[Click Here to Go There](#)



**Superb - Defending Britain Since 1710**



## ANDY BRIERLEY'S BLOG

Hello Shipmates,

Have always read about Stasi in East Germany; now have another couple of recent publications pending attention. One titled *Bugging You - in The Lives of Others*, by Ulrich Mühe; the other, *The Grey Men*, pursuing the Stasi into the present, by Ralph Hope.

Some time ago I read of informers in that Soviet controlled area, especially the city of Berlin, where Stasi had 1800 informers - could that be true? Every place, public or private that could possibly be wired for bugging had it covertly installed; somewhat like the mindset of the Woke Organisation of the U.K. who are hell bent on censoring any public, or private, speaker here in our homeland whose opinion is at variance with their idea of English language historical common usage.

It becomes serious when realised they start at the top with people the calibre of university lecturers and guest speakers of all hues, beliefs or affiliations who sadly, if they have the temerity to speak up, are hounded out of their positions by gutless chancellors who rule those high-flown establishments.

As a preamble to the next bit I will say a staunch old friend had a seat on the London Metal Exchange, in younger days; that must have been where he honed his bogging ability with weights and figures, done in double quick time, in the head. He got into dealing with East Germany and Germans. The regime had imploded by the time I was doing a job at Canada dock 2 in Liverpool, and he was expecting a small coaster from Germany to dock further down and said I should come and view the cargo. It was packed solid, chocker-block with old wiring looms such as found in old tower blocks, or demolished factories. The boat was well down on its marks so must have been approaching high hundreds of tons - where is that mares nest from? He said it was all Stasi installed; listening, recording, broadcasting, wiring from homes, factories, shops, bus stops, rail stations, public lavatories; anywhere the population may be chatting together, assuming it was private. People are horrified by the knowledge that children informed on their parents. How far is that from budding university graduates, funded by mum and dad to the tune of nine to twelve grand, hounding notable achievers out of their teaching jobs, silenced by a bunch of snow flakes, who thus far in life, have done F A to enhance the common lot by word or deed.



I would encourage any child of mine to harbour diverse opinion, but no brow beating, or use it to spoil the way of life of others if you are part of mob. Financial and domestic support would cease P.D.Q.



I was able during, the period in question, to get close-ish to the Stasi area of activity as young brother worked for an organisation called BRIXMIS. His station in the East was once home to the Tirpitz family at Potsdam. A large house about half a mile over the Glienicke Bridge, latterly known as the Bridge of Spies (maybe you saw a film of that name!).

My brother told me the large house was provided by the Soviets, so was expected to be bugged up to the eyeballs. In the package were servants, cook, housekeeper, three or four maids; mature ladies but one, whom Colin said, notable for her short tight skirt and attractive derriere, just in case the Sovs got lucky; it was taken as read that most staff were - Stasi. They also had a gardener, a very pleasant old boy, a bit removed from the others who would do favours, on the quiet, for scented soap, decent cigars and he was popular with the Brits. Sadly he passed away; the station chief asked the housekeeper if she thought the family would appreciate a half dozen Brits in No. 1 uniform to show respect and send him on his way. The idea was quickly turned down, the family wishes was for a very private function, simple with just a few old friends, but thank you!! Came the day of the funeral, duty officer decided to pop along alone. He and driver turned up at the cemetery and waited for the cortege. Funeral party turned up, cars disgorged mourners, all in full Stasi uniform; pleasant old gardener's coffin had his Stasi cap on top - comment back at mission house 'Red faces all round'. Getting up to Berlin could be done in three ways (1) Fly, (2) British military train from Helmstedt in the west or (3) drive the Corridor.



Cephas, my father 'Checking out' the British military train engine

My parents, visiting my brother in Charlottenburg apartment, always flew. The old man was a steam devotee and loved to ride the train from Berlin to Brit check at Helmstedt and back a couple of times; not because a free lunch was served (and it was) but the countryside was lovely and it was always hauled by an exotic foreign steam locomotive, his particular thing.

Jo and I, plus young Andy drove the corridor like an adventure. We had to have military sponsor when reporting in at Helmstedt, the British Control point; four A4 sheet of 'dos and don'ts' had to be read and signed. Crossing to the East the *volkspolotzie* took over.

We started following the Brit rules and opened the car windows 4 inches, no more, no less. East police barked into the car a demand for our three passports. Western powers did not recognise the G.D.P. (German Democratic Party) so their stamp in our passports was an emphatic 'No-No'. As per instruction sheets; look nonchalantly into his eyes and say, quietly, "Soviet", each time barked at "Soviet". All calculated to intimidate and did, to a degree. Eventually a Soviet guard, jodhpurs and tailored smock, pistol at hip, polished high boots, 6 foot tall, at least, smart, smart, approached and said something, pivoted and marched back to his office; one had to follow 6" from his heels. A point at his office - was bring passports, tap window, stand back,

offer books, window snaps open, books snatched, window slammed in face. Same to get books back. No word spoken or invited. A similar palaver on other end of corridor which terminated on what was a straight on the pre war Avus banked motor race circuit, a Mercedes bench facility. Managed to blot my copy book there, be here all week if I tried to write that.

Father liked to visit Meissen porcelain show room in the East. A British military bus was laid on certain days for that. He thought he was the 'great pimpnel' bringing things to the U.K. wrapped in brown paper, not declared, it being high priced here at home; beautiful stuff. Bought in the East for West marks, East marks not fit to wipe one's - nose - on. The British sector took in what was pre-war Olympic Village. It included two beautiful swimming pools, kept in pristine order. Most days we, Jo, the boy and I, were the only users. One massive gym with lovely polished hardwood floors was a truck garage. The stadium that figures prominently on TV was a place for very occasional dog walkers, or get a picture sat in Adolph's V.I.P. box. To look at the track, seeing in the mind's eye, Jessie Owens running blond, super-Aryans into the ground did give one a certain feeling of 'Up yours' Mein Herr. Though not once did we experience the slightest anti Brit conduct, out and about, beer hall or super store. No Germans were allowed in the Olympic complex as it was a large army camp. All upkeep, accommodation, schooling for nephews, everything paid by Berlin, the Bonn Government as 'reparations'.

I learned the French sector requested, had delivered every few days, a selection of fresh flowers, winter and summer. Memories of that interesting time flood back as I write. Am glad we went, now and again, where most feared to tread; wife and son a good get out card.

Now it's hard to avoid tourist traps. We web-footed sort struck lucky with *Superb*, that got us round the Americas before cruise ships and such altered, in a large way, the character of most stops. Apart from that we were all slender, bronzed and muscular; pretty even when doing a 'blue jackets' guard; a credit, ambassadors even, for a nicer, older Britain.

"Get me a dry handkerchief Jo"  
Be seeing you



When 'The Wall' did finally come down in 1990 it was quite an emotional experience for others, and myself, with whom I have since discussed the event, we had not expected to see the collapse of the Soviet Empire in our lifetimes. With the coming down of 'The Wall', and the reunification of Germany, the occupation of Berlin and the role of B.R.I.X.M.I.S. was at an end, so the bags were packed, and the troops left.

The 'Brits' bowed out by giving a military tattoo at the 'Waldebuhne', an open-air concert arena holding 20,000, appropriate because the Germans do love a good military parade. The tattoo, was held over two nights due to the tremendous response, and on each night the arena was jammed. While the rain just bucketed down, the audience, totally ignoring the weather, gave the bands an amazing ovation.

*"A Part of Colin's letter to me"*

What a way to leave, with pride, gratitude and dignity, it has not happened often to us Brits, and I take pride in the fact that I made a contribution.

Above photos are a copy of Colin's Russian Pass his name is 3<sup>rd</sup> line top left





## NOZZERS GO WEST Part 27

*Rio's economy was going through a bad patch and most things were very cheap, due to the falling currency, falling or otherwise, he was just glad to know that his pay would stretch that much further. He touched lucky in that through not being able to get ashore in Santos, their last port of call, he hadn't been able to change his money and those that had found they were out of pocket because the rate fell so quickly that during their overnight trip down the river to Rio, their Brazilian money had devalued and the English pounds were worth a whole lot more. Even so, with money still in their pockets, most of the last minute shoppers trooped back aboard in time for the evening meal. It was a lovely day and they'd had a very pleasant, if somewhat sober, afternoon out. There was no point in hanging it out until the very last minute for the sake of a couple of more beers and missing the last meal of the day and, in any case, tomorrow was, as yet, untouched.*

With Sunday came the visitors again and although Ginger was seeing these occasions in a different light of late compared to a last run ashore in Brazil, the run ashore got the vote. There had been talk onboard of the large British community in Brazil and that the British were probably the big investors of the country. A lot of them had settled in Icarai where the Rio Cricket Club and Rio Yacht Club were situated. Although thinking such places could be snobbish and not geared to the likes of mere boy seamen, he and couple of others decided to take a look any way as it was their last day.

Icarai had a beach but as they were not anticipating a swim they had not brought trunks and towels with them. They were impressed to learn that a large diving board type of structure just off the beach had been erected by an Englishman sometime in the past. The English also had a hand in introducing football to the Brazilians. They were told that the British had formed the first football teams at the Rio Cricket Club thereby introducing the sport to Brazil. Ginger reflected how time had proved that to have been a costly error of judgment seeing how the Brazilians and, indeed, most South American countries, were now better and more colourful at the game than their English counterparts. It was also dropped into the conversation that the Rio Yacht Club had been responsible for bringing the sport of sailing to Rio sometime in the past. But interesting as those facts were, it was the last hours of their day in Rio and time, they felt, to give the place the traditional matelots farewell. Their hosts for the afternoon had been generous and hospitable but they wanted to spend the last of their time in Rio having a final look round and downing a few beers, so, taking leave of their new friends of the British community they headed back to the town centre and indulged in the ancient art of exchanging the coins in their pockets for the cool beers that Rio had to offer. After all it would be at least nine days before they would get another chance.

For reasons known best to themselves, another salute was fired as they left Rio. Quite unexpectedly the forward four-inch mounting on the starboard side suddenly opened up. It was just after 1100 and it occurred to Ginger that with a little more thought they could have waited another hour and really unconvinced everyone just as they would have been sitting down to their dinner at midday. It caught him unawares because he had no idea they would be firing again upon leaving; they had never done so before, or maybe they had but at least not to his knowledge. Perhaps it was the custom to fire another salute upon leaving anywhere where they had fired one coming in. Although they were certainly doing so this time, it could hardly be a one-off, he surmised. Then, on the other hand, maybe it was because he couldn't possibly have missed it every time they had performed it so far. The salute, as they entered foreign ports, was to the Governor or President or whomever but it always had a secondary bonus in that it declared their arrival and left no one in doubt that Superb was in town. There had never been any feedback at previous places visited, or at least none had filtered down as far as the boys messdeck but at Rio everyone knew of their entrance, as they announced their presence with twenty-one explosions. Being a bay helped to magnify the sound and locals from Icarai to the centre of town and probably to Copacabana beach as well, had been made aware of the new boys before they even had a chance to tie-up alongside.

Most places visited and, he suspected, places still to be visited as well, had a large contingent of British residents but never before had he heard of their entering harbour being such a talking point. Most of the visitors that had come aboard in Rio, wanted to congratulate someone, anyone, on the grand spectacle. Comments ranged from '*Magnificent sight*' and '*Wonderful display*' to one excited woman telling a group of people who apparently had not seen them entering harbour that '*they came racing in with all guns blazing*'. Possibly a bit over the top but that was the way she saw the event.

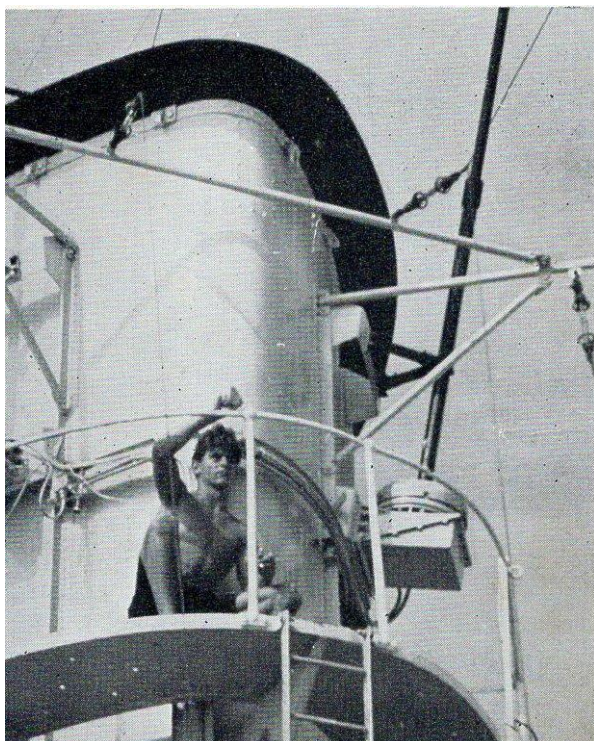
Although Superb had visited Rio a couple of commissions earlier and presumably the other flagships during the intervening years would have as well, this 'showing the flag' commission had captured the imagination and grabbed the attention of the British and indigenous population like never before and they were not backward in saying so. But why they had decided to fire another salute as they left was anybody's guess. Maybe the senior officers had been treated to such a good time in the palaces and mansions during their visit that they had agreed to another display on the way out. Anyway, for whatever reason, there it was - another salute for Rio.

For some, Rio had not lived up to expectations but Ginger had had a whale of a time. For their seven day stay he had been ashore three times and enjoyed himself during the children's party. He had sought out and found a local pennant that he liked to pick up at every place they visited, if possible. Not all towns had them or at least they were not always easy to find. Most places had them on display and they were a nice memento of his visit, plus they were usually quite cheap. He had also bought an animal skin purse to take home and had been to the famous



Copacabana beach but he never did get to go up the big Corcovado Mountain with the statue. He had been put right about that statue earlier, when he had referred to it as a statue of Jesus. Those young school boys were the ones to sort him out over that little misunderstanding. 'It's called the statue of Christ, everyone knows that', they told him in no uncertain terms. Now, in the cold light of Monday morning and with his money spent, it had been time to leave and he was ready. Ready for new delights of far distant shores.

Once clear of the harbour and with dinner behind them, the word was out that they had nine days at sea ahead of them with nothing to look forward to except the welcome return of the 'Golden Eagle' again on Friday.



But being at sea didn't mean an easy time would be forthcoming, this 'showing the flag' was hard work. There was scrubbing, chipping and painting to be undertaken continuously and not forgetting the scrubbing of the quarterdeck every morning at 0600. Everyone was involved in helping to keep the ship looking in pristine condition at all times and even a certain off duty quartermaster's mate's mate was obliged to join in, particularly with the early morning quarterdeck ritual.

The thought of nine days at sea ahead of them to look forward to was a daunting prospect and one that Ginger was not at all happy about although on the other hand it was providential in some respects

because he, like the majority of those on board, was skint and would remain so until Friday, all of five days away. Being broke at sea was no real hardship. He always made sure he had enough essentials like toothpaste, soap, razor blade and dhobi-dust to last through from one payday to the next but being potless whilst in harbour was a different story altogether. It was tantamount to mental torture sitting in the mess with empty pockets and watching others getting dressed up for a run ashore.

To some degree Ginger had learned his lesson on that subject whilst on the *Implacable*. It had been his first time with more than seven and sixpence in his hand and, unlike *Ganges*, there had been plenty of places more than ready to relieve him of his new-found wealth. An over indulgence of chocolate and ice-cream goffas soon saw the kitty empty and when it came to a decent run ashore all he could do was stand and stare at the vast array of goods and trinkets in shop windows, with the only thing in his pockets being his hands.



Being at sea was a different matter because there were no shoreside distractions and usually, soon after eight o'clock of an evening, most people not on watch were in their hammocks and asleep.

The photographs appeared the day after they left Rio; the Royal Marines had theirs on display, as usual, outside their little darkroom at one end of the sickbay flat and the ship's photographer and his gang had their stall at the other end of the flat outside the gunnery



office. Business was fairly brisk, mostly with senior rates and officers and Ginger hoped they wouldn't sell out before payday, when he would have a bit of money. As luck would have it, most people seemed to be in the same boat and trade really picked up straight after the 'Golden Eagle' had laid its golden egg. During the intervening days whilst waiting for payday Ginger had perused the racks of pictures thoroughly time and time again. There was quite a display and he was hard pressed to narrow his choice down to his customary six and having had four days to ponder the choices, he was still no closer to making the final selection. In the end he bought twice his normal number, enough to cover two pages in his album - after all Rio de Janeiro had been a special place.

**TO BE CONTINUED NEXT MONTH**

## MY TRAVEL PLANS 2021

Expectations



Reality



# GIVE MY REGARDS TO BROADWAY



By Percy (John) Horry Ex Acting Chief Petty Officer Cook

**F**rom the age of eight I always wanted to go to Broadway, New York; on one of our cruises to the West Indies I finally made it but my tale of what I term as a rare coincidence started 56 years ago in Aberdeen, Scotland.

I was aboard the minesweeper *Pluto* on Icelandic Fishery Protection when granted a week's



leave. Travelling down to London by train I met a middle-aged couple of Scots, married and happy, they told me they were going to New York to train Alsatian dogs for the New York Police Department. He said, "I have two giant bottles of whisky, one for this train journey and one for the ship". Well we started sipping and some hours later found us in London glowing

with bonhomie where we parted and wishing them good luck I staggered home to rest my bloodshot eyes.

Six years later in New York the *Superb* docked in lower Manhattan in the Queen Mary berth my childhood dream almost complete. Our captain and officers entertained a lot and on the first night after duty; I went ashore round about twenty-two hundred.

Going through the giant shed on pier 92 I ran into about a hundred dock workers having a meeting. Just as I was making my way towards the large exit doors and carefully keeping on the fringe of the crowd it all kicked off. Punches were thrown with men kicking and screaming wherever you looked.

I was trapped and desperately looking for an easy way out of all that confusion when the big doors crashed open and masses of truncheon-wielding police rushed in preceded by large ferocious looking Alsatian dogs. One of them leaped at me and seized my arm, my cap fell off as I fell to the floor, I struggled, my jacket was ripped with the dog still attached firmly to my arm.

Two coppers grabbed me and, with many Dockers, I was thrown into a meat wagon and taken to the precinct where I was put in a cage with something like 40 of the fighters and the door



locked. The protests were loud and the coppers screamed out, "Silence or we'll hose you down". The men ignoring that advice shouted louder and suddenly high pressure water jets were aimed at us all.

Now I exceeded 18 stone in weight but those jets of icy water spun me round like a top and sent me flat on my back.

Silence was then observed.

Soaked to the skin, uniform torn and thoroughly dejected, I called out to a Policeman in my cockney accent, "I'm from that British Royal Navy ship tied up at the Pier" and waved my paybook at him through the cell bars. The copper wandered away and about ten minutes later I was taken from the cell to the Station Precinct desk. After listening to my story, examining my paybook and looking at the remnants of my uniform the sergeant apologised and gave me a fistful of dollars, I guess from the station fund, and they gave me a lift back to the ship where they explained my plight and appearance to the Duty Officer.



HMS Superb  
docked at Pier 92  
New York in  
September 1953

However, before I left the Police station I asked the duty Sergeant about those Alsatian dogs. He explained that a Scots couple had come over from Europe a few years before to train them. What a good job they did and how much of a coincidence is that?

Mind you a couple of nights later I did make it to Broadway and what a time I had.

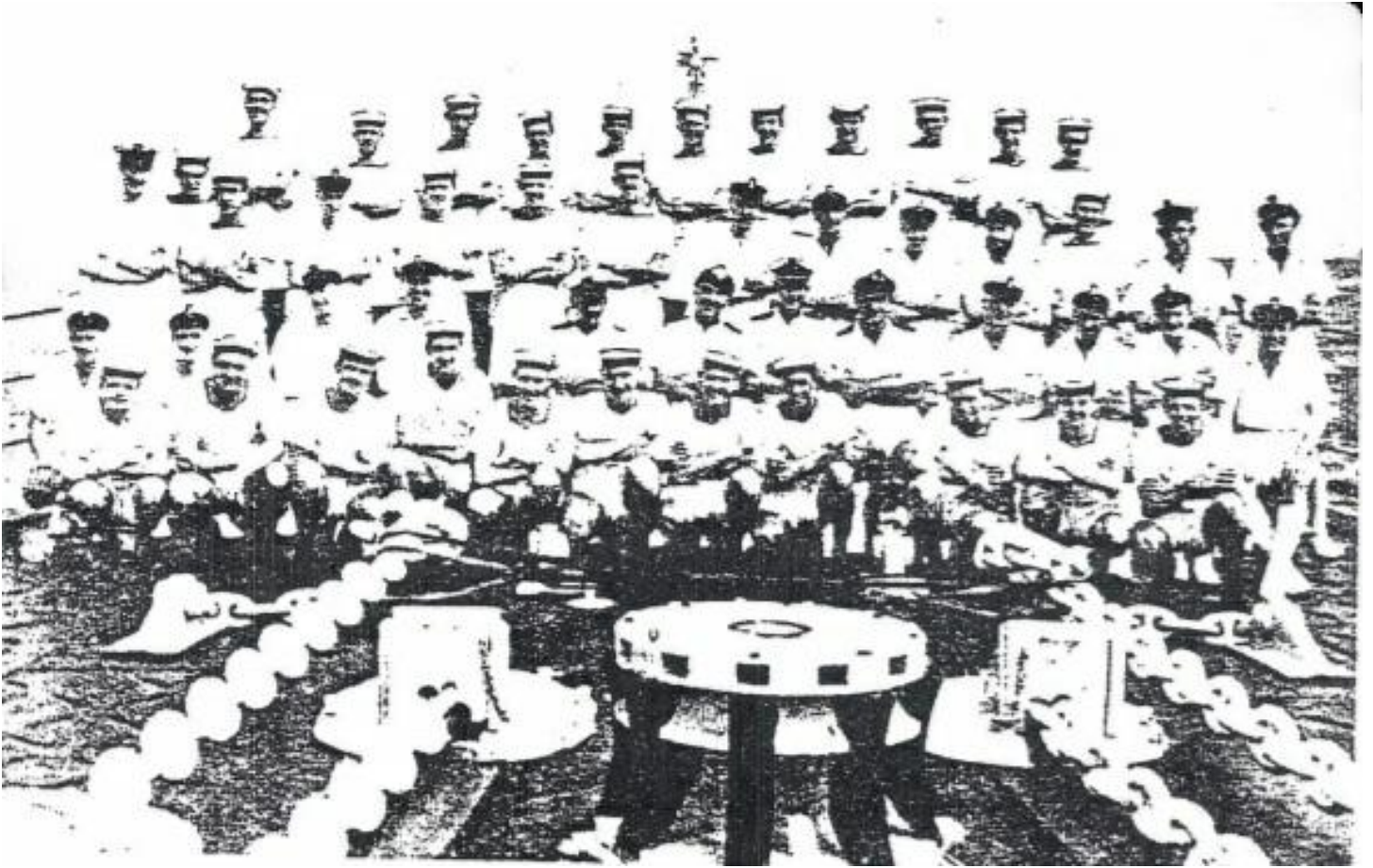
**This story comes from the archives of Ray Lambert**

**Shipmate John Horry (wrote the above for Fred Kinsey) and crossed the bar on 3<sup>rd</sup> June, 2011.**

# BACK IN 1956 Part 20

By Lt. Cdr. E. H. Chittleburgh

## THE ELECTRICAL DIVISION



**B**y the time commissioning day arrived, most of the electrical Division had joined and taken over from the Gigolos of the West Indies, determined to show that East can do better than West. R.E.M.'s Eastwood and Marsland and E.M.' Lake and Dando stayed to see there was no cheating. Anyway, by the time we slipped from a cold and damp Chatham for warmer parts, we were ready for the fray both on board and ashore. We had a big start over the rest of the ship in that in L.E.M. Cooke we had the only real native from Ceylon and he had promised us a high time East of Suez!

The next couple of months are best passed over quickly as they involved two visits to Bahrein including a sensational run ashore organised by R.E.M.' Matron and Hutchinson at the expense of a local Sheikh. Our arrival in Trinco cunningly coincided with their hot spell, and the department put its back into producing as much artificial wind as possible and changing whiteness consequently to redness and brownness.

After a number of 'We are's, we aren't's' the floodlighting booms were rigged and we sailed for East Africa and the bright lights. I think Mombasa, Dar-es-Salaam and Zanzibar will mainly be remembered for the victory of East African Breweries Ltd. Over a very strong electrical team and the election of S/Lt. Hannam to the position of the complete all-round sportsman when he left fully booted and spurred for Morogoro. Lt. Williams, L.E.M.' McNeil and Cooke played for the ships XV during this short season as well. The Seychelles will be remembered for many reasons, although El. Mech. Brown and L.E.M Osgood still talk about a certain theatrical producer who took 60 amps. through a 5 amp. switch three hours before the show!

Our subsequent arrival in Trinco was for the serious part of the commission-J.E.T.. Besides being a busy time electrically, this was the sporting occasion of the year. R.E.M. Walker can be congratulated on the ingenious method by which he acquired a soccer pitch practically daily against all-comers. As a Division we didn't collect any cups, but we never refused a challenge or failed to give our utmost. During this period the athletics meet was held, and L.E.M. Cooke and R.E.M. Hutchinson are to be commended for their efforts, as are the stalwarts who started and eventually completed the regatta training.

After the departure of I.N and P.N. the Division took their turn in Diyatalawa, a period which I believe was enjoyed by all. It was only a pity that Colonel Nasser demanded our presence elsewhere or I am sure the Division would have left their mark on India as well. But he did give us Simon's Town and now we have Chatham and March to look forward to again.

The electrical department suffered a very personal loss with the death of P.O. Elect. Underhill on passage from Mombasa to Simon's town and our sincerest condolences go to his family.

The wife came home early and found her husband in their bedroom making love to a very attractive young woman.

And she was somewhat upset. 'You are a disrespectful pig' she cried. 'How dare you do this to me -- a faithful wife, the mother of your children! I'm leaving you ... I want a divorce right away!'

And the husband replied, 'Hang on just a minute love so at least I can tell you what happened.'

'Fine, go ahead,' she sobbed, 'but they'll be the last words you'll say to me!' And the husband began -- 'Well, I was getting into the car to drive home, and this young lady here asked me for a lift. She looked so down and out and defenceless that I took pity on her and let her into the car...

I noticed that she was very thin, not well dressed and very dirty. She told me that she hadn't eaten for three days... So, in my compassion, I brought her home and warmed up the enchiladas I made for you last night, the ones you wouldn't eat because you're afraid you'll put on weight.

The poor thing devoured them in moments. Since she needed a good clean-up, I suggested a shower, and while she was doing that, I noticed her clothes were dirty and full of holes, so I threw them away. Then, as she needed clothes, I gave her the designer jeans that you have had for a few years, but don't wear because you say they are too tight.

I also gave her the underwear that was your anniversary present, which you don't wear because I don't have good taste. I found the sexy blouse my sister gave you for Christmas that you don't wear just to annoy her, and I also donated those boots you bought at the expensive boutique and don't wear because someone at work has a pair the same.'

The husband took a quick breath and continued - 'She was so grateful for my understanding and help that as I walked her to the door, she turned to me with tears in her eyes and said,

~Please ... Do you have anything else that your wife doesn't use?'

**Sent in by Sharky Ward**



# ANOTHER DOOR

## Part 3

by Tom Simkins MBE

### IN BELEAGUERED SINGAPORE

The launch duly dropped us at the Changi barracks wharf. Changi was later to become infamous in its use as a prisoner of war camp where so many suffered as a result of inhuman treatment by the Japanese. Having established our identity, a lorry was organised to take us to the city and thence to the Seaman's mission. The captain and mate John Watts and with three other crewmembers, were taken by car direct to the General hospital.

The ride from Changi along East Coast road to the outskirts of the city was not at all comforting and did nothing to amend my previous miserable thoughts, in fact just the opposite. The Kalang airfield was just a black shell sitting in smoke and surrounded by all sorts of debris. Right along the Beach road it was just one long sad sight of wrecked houses and shops. I learned later it was a result of a very recent air raid, the biggest so far when 380 people had been killed and 500 or so injured.

In the city centre things didn't look as bad as I was expecting, remembering all the black smoke I had seen earlier. It was surprising to see so many people about, and things looking so very normal! Negotiating Fullerton road and Robinson road and finally Anson road junction we arrived at the mission about 4.00 p.m.

Our little party comprised the elderly Chief Engineer, 2nd and 3rd engineers Noel Green and Arthur Greene, 4th engineer 'Sniffy' Wilson, 2nd and 3rd deck officers John Wood and Sandy Robertson, Shorty Armstrong, and of course, me. It didn't take long for us to decide that we had come to the wrong island. A nice big one like Australia would have been a better one'.

As a result of some of our party chatting with the crew of the 'Bulan' and then the chaps at Changi later we learned that the aircraft that we had mistakenly taken for Lockheed Hudson, were actually Japanese Navy 96. Seven had attacked us in two waves, approaching from fore and aft of the ship, gunning, then releasing their bombs. Several had landed just fore'd of the bridge and had obviously penetrated the deck, and then exploded in the petrol cargo below (and hence why the radio room deck came up). As far as I remember, others landed fore'd amidships and the sea around.

According to mate John Wood who was on the bridge with the Captain and Watts, they were both without jackets (because of the midday heat) and hence the reason for their extensive burns, but Wood himself, fully dressed, escaped with only a few minor burns beneath his burned uniform. The few days that followed while resting at the mission could hardly be called restful. The rumblings of gunfire day and night, the frequent air raids and the disturbing reports of the



approaching Japanese all contributed to the nasty feeling of being trapped. Not those official broadcasts said a great deal. It seemed that the emphasis was always on the way our troops had withdrawn to more defensive and strategic positions, than that the Japanese had advanced; and landings on the island were imminent. I didn't sleep too well at first. As an alternative to counting sheep I tried to tabulate in my mind, all the articles I had lost on the ship. My camera, radio, typewriter, brass-ware bought in Calcutta, jewellery from Thailand, and in particular, my numerous pen and ink sketches of parts of Singapore's shanty areas. But that didn't work. Instead I was assailed with mental pictures of fire, bombed out foc'sle charred bodies and magnified pictures of numerous things that never happened. The more I tried to shut them out, the more insistent they became.

At breakfast time, all was well, and the nice feeling of being all in one piece prevailed again. A day or so later, after our arrival at the mission, ex-second mate John Wood and I went into the city centre, which was only a short walk from the mission. It was difficult to believe that such a grave situation existed, for it seemed that everywhere it was business as usual, just the same as on my previous visit. In fact, I don't think the situation was thought to be grave. Chatting to people here and there, it was a case of ...'Yes, the situation is rather sticky, but it will sort itself out'. I doubt if it was ever anticipated then, that it would sort itself out the way that it did - well, not until a few days later.

The walk from Anson Road, along Robinson Road and past the Marconi office, across into Raffles Place, then down Change Alley, and on to Collyer Quay, Fullerton Road and then over the bridge to Raffles Hotel, was just like the walk I had done so many times before.

I saw practically no damage, Robinson's department store was flourishing (despite the bomb damage that had wrecked the restaurant a few weeks earlier) as too was Kelly and Walshe's bookshop and Maynards chemist etc. Change Alley was so packed that it was difficult to get along it. Elevenses at Raffles were very little different from the many previous visits I had made, and with exactly the same service. I learned later that it was practically impossible to get a table there in the evening unless reserved previously. Dan Hopkins band still played, and entry for 'other ranks' was still prohibited. The only problem to an evening visit was the lack of taxis. They had stopped operating at night - not that either of us wanted an evening visit.

It was interesting to see the crowd that was going into the Alhambra theatre - it was showing, unless the poster was an old one, "The Ziegfeld girl". It was also amazing to think that the Japanese army was now less than 20 miles away and facing our troops across the demolished causeway prior to an invasion assault on the island proper.

Moving away from the city centre, like the scene I had witnessed along Beach Road after leaving Changi, it was a different situation of bombed streets and dwellings, and it seemed that





it was the local population of Indians, Chinese and Malays who had suffered the most from the raids, with hundreds killed and maimed.

The sirens went while we were near Clifford pier and then a squadron of aircraft came over. Before we heard the multiple explosions, we could see bombs leave the aircraft simultaneously then lazily fall in the direction of Anson Road and Keppel docks. We decided it might be a good idea if we returned and checked if the mission was still there ...and standing.

Well it was, but not far down the road beyond it towards where the dock area and Godowns began, huge flames and black smoke was shooting skywards with an accompanying stench of burning rubber. Upon arriving back at the mission there was quite a little panic brewing, because apparently there had been a desperate need for a driver because promised transport had not turned up and there was no one around who could drive a car. The first words that greeted us were, 'For God's sake can either of you drive a car? ...' I thought there must have been some casualties as a result of the bombing, so I said 'Yes, I could', but all it was, was a bunch of people who had obtained tickets for a place on a ship that was due to leave that afternoon! Under the prevailing circumstances I would have dumped that bulky luggage and gone down the road at a steady trot until I arrived at one of the few ships that would be taking me home and away from the 'Fortress and jewel of the east'.

Somebody once said, 'as you go through life you should always be prepared to abandon your luggage ...' Here was an instance when it would have paid off. Anyway fate took a hand and placed me in the driving seat of an old - well old now, not then - Austin 16 with a gate change gearbox. The drive to the docks along Keppel harbour road wasn't exactly I nightmare quality, but as the saying goes, the thing that dreams are made of.

Having passed the still burning Godown (dock's warehouse), there were convoys of people carrying bags, soldiers travelling both ways. Air-raid sirens were whining repeatedly, and nearly every conceivable bit of space on footpaths and road filled with not just parked but abandoned cars, left haphazardly, as their owners had driven as far as they could and then left them without even bothering to close the doors.

What a treat if one could have kept the conditions yet changed the circumstances! Any car you want, complete with ignition keys absolutely free for the taking - provided of course you could get it out!

Partly along Keppel Road it was impossible to get past the congestion which was solved almost as soon as I arrived - a big army vehicle just bulldozed through several vehicles, leaving them blocking the approach road to the station instead. (I remember smoke billowing out over the station, but I'm not sure if it was on that occasion, or a later day).



Pausing on the roadside, it was an incredible sight to see Japanese aircraft lazily soaring about the sky unopposed while here below, luggage-laden and child carrying evacuees progressed toward their destination apparently resigned and unconcerned.

One of my passengers was an officer from the *Empress of Asia* that had been one of a convoy of ships comprising the *'Felix Roussel'*, the *'Gorgan'* and perhaps two or three others. Being an old ship she had not been able to keep pace with the others bound for Singapore and had fallen behind after the Sunda Straits. She had survived earlier attacks but had finally been bombed and wrecked just short of Singapore Island then finally beached on Sulton Shoal and abandoned. I was to pass the burned out wreck of the *'Empress'* later.

Surveying the incredible sight of what appeared to be hundreds of abandoned cars, the officer said that while waiting at the mission, he had been told that there may be a problem getting along Keppel Harbour Road. The abandoned cars had been left mostly by the evacuees desperate to catch what was thought (but incorrectly at the time) to be the last ships likely to be leaving the harbour. One had been the *'Westpoint'* and others the *'Wakefield'* *'Duchess of Bedford'* and *'Empress of Japan'* which had left a short time before. The now bombed and wrecked *'Empress of Asia'* had been bringing a contingent of troops, their equipment and also much needed armament and supplies to Singapore. But instead, those supplies were lost, and the hundreds of survivors from the wreck had ended up as a negative fighting force and a liability on the island's survival and hospital facilities.

It is sad to reflect now, that instead of being a bolster to the hard pressed Singapore defenders, they were destined to join them as prisoners of war and on the notorious bridge and railway construction camps, where so many suffered and perished.

I dropped my passengers in the region of whatever number dock gate it was, where they joined what appeared to be an enormous stationary queue. It probably took me half-an-hour to turn the car round because of the many vehicles proceeding towards the city and hampered by the congestion. During that time it didn't seem as though that queue had moved more than a couple of yards!

On my way back, as I left the dock area and Keppel Road with an inward sigh of relief, a chap I recognised carrying a large parcel flagged me down, obviously requiring a lift. As I braked to stop, I was digging in my memory for his name. Climbing aboard he introduced himself. Hammond, - that was it.

I had a good reason for remembering him. He was on the staff of the *'Tribune'* newspaper. We had met several times at the Sea View Hotel, at least a year previously when he learnt I was on the *'Kistna'* visiting Bangkok. He was interested in getting information from me, so much so,



that later, he invited me out to lunch. We had a shell fish meal. A week later I was still getting over the effect of the fish poisoning!

Hammond said among other things, that the Tribune newspaper works, just off Anson Road (a little way off from the Mission) had received a direct hit and hence his presence on my route. In response to my remarks about the waiting queue I had seen at the dock gate, he said that one of his colleagues had taken his wife to the dock to board an outward bound ship, and that there had been one man sitting down taking passes and writing down names laboriously, as if next week would do, and one soldier opening and shutting the dock gate for each entry.

I took the newspaperman and his parcel into the city centre and was glad to be returning to the Mission after the chaos along the Keppel Road. I had had expectations, fortunately not fulfilled, of those lazily circling aircraft suddenly doing a diving shoot-up along that straight length of road. It had been stiflingly hot too. I felt like a lump of lard.

Turning off the road into the Mission forecourt, I was dismayed to find yet another small bevy of hopeful passengers also waiting to get transport to the docks. Two of them were Marconi men, one I think was off the 'Harper' that I had heard being attacked, and which later had been attacked again and sunk. The two were being repatriated and they wondered why I was not going with them - so did I. I decided that tomorrow I would be on the Marconi office doorstep at opening time. I had been there only that morning while out with John Wood, and was told that they were doing their best to get me repatriated.

Eight bodies eventually crammed themselves into the Austin - four of them, two of which were the Radio Officers, would not have any truck with the amount of luggage of the other four which was impeding entry, for there was no external luggage accommodation on the Austin. Typical of cars of that period, luggage extensions that could be fitted on the back of the cars were an optional extra. The four had their first lesson as to when it was expedient to abandon their surplus luggage. I felt for them, having just experienced my own loss.

There was no fuss, prudence triumphed over chattels. The party was already an hour late on the scheduled departure of the ship. I had said to them at first, that I wasn't prepared on this trip to go any further than the railway station, which was a quarter of the way along the dock area, having experienced my first journey. But I relented. I was niggled that they could be so stupid as to wait around for transport when they could have set off at that steady trot down Keppel Road. However, as I learned later from then en route, there had been long, long queues and delays for berth passes, and they had only just arrived at the Mission a short time before my arrival. I also learned later still, that they need not have been in such a hurry, for after all, the "Felix Roussel" did not sail until the following day anyway.

Whether because it was in my genes that we British didn't lose battles, I hadn't thought really



seriously about Singapore actually giving up, notwithstanding the obvious indications. I think it was that second return trip from Keppel docks with the setting sun behind me accentuating the darker sky ahead with the huge black smoke drifting over the city that later gave me a very worried sleepless night. Sleepless because of the many explosions and the rumbling of guns becoming audible, indicative of the nearness of the Japanese - plus biting mosquitoes. Sleepless also because of the now nagging worry (the way worries do nag in the small hours) as to how I was going to get out and away from Singapore. Most certainly I would be at the Marconi office pronto tomorrow, and to hell with 'don't ring us, we'll ring you! ..."

But in the morning light my attitude was softened. Mr. Robertson in the Marconi office was not in the position to offer me immediate transport home. There were waiting queues, and anyway, he was not to know I was going to arrive out of the blue. Both he and Mr. Thompson in the office were in a worried tizzy themselves, for both their wives had caught a ship a few days ago, and they had had no news as to whether or not their ship had got through the airborne blockade.

I wonder how I would have reacted if I had been offered a passage on a ship going back the same way that we had arrived?

I learned later that those large ships full of evacuees did suffer bombing attacks but did get through safely. Mr. Pinto the Indian clerk lived with his wife and family in the city. How any of the staff fared, regrettably now, I never bothered to find out.

For the next three days it seemed that I did little else but provide a taxi service which included making two more trips to the docks.

Arthur Greene had developed tonsillitis due to stress a couple of days after our arrival at the Mission, and had been received into the General hospital just off Outram Road. I don't actually remember taking him although I must have done so for it is unlikely that we would have walked. I did make several visits to the hospital at that time while I was ferrying with the Austin. I remember being there on February 6th because a bomb had just been dropped on the hospital and there was quite a pandemonium. When I replied to a query from the oil company's representative later, I said, 'In accompanying Arthur Greene to the hospital, I also went to see Captain Thomas and Chief Officer Watts. They both appeared to be progressing satisfactorily'.

I wasn't to know then that in ten days time they were to be still in hospital suffering from septic burns complications, and also as POW's. Although Arthur Greene escaped I learnt much later that Captain Thomas survived internment but that John Watts did not.

Sometime on, February 9th, I had taken one of the Mission staff to the Central Market - or it could have been the cold storage in Orchard Road for some urgently needed supplies which were getting increasingly difficult to obtain because of the run on commodities up to that time. As we were returning from the Orchard Road, Bridge Road area, which had just been at the receiving end of a bombing raid, we were flagged down by, two what must have been ARP chaps. There were casualties, water and debris everywhere. I was asked would I take some casualties to the General Hospital in Outram Road which was fortunately on our way back to the Mission anyway.

I was quite happy to co-operate, if it would get me moving from that spot, particularly as the chaps had said that long range shells from the Japanese artillery had been arriving spasmodically. But I did feel a bit ashamed as I observed those ARP people just pressing on, and appearing unperturbed.

Arriving at the hospital, which is why I recall this incident, it seemed to be in an even bigger state of untidiness since my previous visit. Further large areas of the once neat grounds had been dug up to provide more long communal graves and there were rows of bodies lying out and awaiting burial. The smell was awful. Somebody said that although they had not hit the hospital with shells, some had been falling in the grounds, but I wasn't interested in investigating for myself. The fact that the Japanese were now near enough to be actually lobbing shells into the city, to say the least, was very disturbing. If I hadn't known how grave the situation was before I picked up the casualties, I certainly knew now...

Also living at the Seaman's Mission, which by the way, was an exceptionally nice place with every 'mod cons" and not the sort of establishment that the title 'Mission' might convey, was a chap whose name was Moss. I had seen him before and recognised his happy looking round face. To all around he was known as 'Mossie' and a very nice character too, probably about 35 years old and was the Captain of a small refuelling vessel of about 75 tons called the *MV 'Kulit'*.

The '*Kulit*' was one of a small fleet of similar vessels owned by the Oil Company. He had been living at the Mission for ten days or so because his Chinese crew (deck hand and engine room man) had decided to go AWL and he was awaiting instructions.

When we first arrived at the Mission, it was Mossie's smiling face that greeted us, and he gave us his ear while we unwound from our respective experiences. Later on he confessed that while he would not have wished on us the circumstances that had brought us to the Mission, he looked upon our arrival as 'Manna from heaven' and he lost no time in presenting himself to the marine superintendent. From the Super' he learned that the company had been desperately trying to get their small craft operating. There had been the need, not only for additional refuelling service to ships alongside and in the Roads (offshore anchorage), but also to comply with a

request from the Military to assist in running fuel and supplies to the fighting units on the West side of the island.

Apparently hitherto, supplies had been amassed on the East Side of the island where it was expected that a main Japanese assault would occur. Unfortunately this had taken place on the West Side, and now there was a panic to get supplies transferred back again to where the Australian troops needed them.

Hindsight tells us now, that by the time that February 9th had dawned, it was far too late anyway. Was the Super aware of that then? The outcome of Mossie's visit to the office resulted in a request that we 'Pinna' survivors attend a meeting there and so we presented ourselves. The superintendent asked if we would be prepared to volunteer for work on, and manning, some of the Company's small craft although he had already put the wheels in action for our speedy evacuation on the grounds that we were technicians who would qualify for early evacuation.

For my money and from my very recent observations we didn't have a thing to lose. If we had to wait our turn for evacuation permits, and boat tickets, then far better to be on something mobile that floated rather than an island that wasn't and didn't!

We had quite a long and convincing sales talk from the Super' of the importance of getting the small craft operative and seaworthy for the important and strategic work already specified. 'And' he said, 'the Company will not forget your co-operation', and then 'this applies to you Sparks'. For as you appreciate I didn't actually work for the oil Company, and hence that remark.

His chosen remarks were so convincing, inspired no doubt from an understandable personal motive, that sitting there at the meeting, I was fully convinced that our contribution to this last ditch stand in the defence of the island would be a turning point in the war, and that Britain would emerge victorious in winning the battle that she always won - the last one!

I lost some of his final remarks because my fantasising thoughts had our little vessel nosing its way up some jungle creek with Japanese firing at us from behind every tree - missing us of course. If I had thought about it at the time I could have added to those fantasising thoughts, remembering Jimmy Bloodso and in the epic poem of the Prairie Bell ... 'I'll drive her nozzle agin the bank until the last soul gets ashore ..." we would discharge what was left of our cargo fuel in the waiting Sherman tanks that would drive the Japanese back into the sea from whence they came.

But such fanciful thoughts would soon have been nipped in the bud had I known, that our harassed and exhausted defending army, was not only lacking in adequate air power, but also that it did not possess a single Sherman tank anyway.



As my thoughts came back to the present, the Super' was really putting it across with his final rhetoric, very much condensed here, but clear in its meaning. "Mossie, you and your little band of volunteers are the only chance that I and the rest of the office staff have in getting clear of this mess. I know it might be exceedingly difficult for you but your presence at Keppel Harbour, wharf 50, at the right time, would be very much appreciated'. Then, 'If we get away safely, I shall see to it personally, that you all get a square deal ..." With a final dramatic gesture he said, 'or I will resign'.

I wondered if we should all have stood up and tossed our toupees in the air and cheered! Later at the Mission, with the first part of the Superintendents message of the afternoon still aglow in my bosom and the last part fraught with thoughts of disaster, I wondered, as did we all, how was anyone going to know in advance that escape was necessary before it was too late to do so? And why the Super's opening gambit in view of his closing one?

The small craft that we had to locate, and make seaworthy, were scattered about. Chatting amongst ourselves, we wondered just how were we to be contacted, carrier pigeon, rocket flares or a relay of runners? (The last one from necessity in view of our likely location being a good swimmer.) When Mossie joined us he said that he was clear as to where to find the small craft, but not where we were to operate with them when made seaworthy. Well he hadn't missed the information - it wasn't given. The answer to that question was shrouded in the portent of the Superintendents' remarks -and wharf 50.

Towards midday on February 9th, after a previous disturbed noisy night, and my return from the cold storage and the hospital visit, I joined Mossie and the others - well, except for the Chief Engineer and Shorty Armstrong who had already fixed themselves up as crew members with Les Clayton. He was Captain of another similar small craft, the *MV "Ribot"*. Les had already received his instructions and was to stand by at Bukom with a view to evacuating the staff there should it become necessary. By 12.30 we had all caught the ferry, doing so between air raids, and were on board the *MV "Kulit"* where she was tied up at the oil installation wharf at Bukom. To make our presence legal, Noel, (*Pinna's* ex 2nd engineer), Sandy Robertson and I were duly signed on as engineering and deck officers. If the worst happened, and deep down, we still didn't think it would, we could demand officer status if we became Prisoners of War ... We, and the world, had yet to learn how the Japanese treated their prisoners, no matter what their status.

After we had fuelled and watered-up the "*Kulit*", and Noel, in his role of Chief Engineer, had familiarised himself with the mysteries of the '*Kulit's*' diesel engine and ancillary machinery, we set off for an anchorage at Tanjong Rhu. My feelings were that we were setting off into the unknown from peaceful Bukom (well, peaceful except for the noise across the water from Singapore).

Tanjong Rhu was a small creek mooring and wharfing facility about 1½ miles east from the city centre, and probably about four miles by sea from Bukom via Keppel harbour. There, we were to locate the *MV "Kepah"*.

Like the *MV "Kulit"* and the *'Ribot'*, it was also a small tanker vessel about 50 ft long with fuel tanks fore and a tiny bridge structure aft, with engine room beneath. When it was made seaworthy ex *'Pinna'* 2nd Officer John Wood would become Captain with Sniffy Wilson and George Robinson as his crew. George had been 2nd engineer on the *'Pinna'* on a previous voyage. He had been waiting for another appointment that had not materialised, and had joined us that morning, a very welcome addition to our mini task force.

The view across the two to three miles stretch of water in the direction of Singapore Island as we made our way across was not a happy one. The sight of several waves of aircraft prompted Mossie to take shelter beneath the steep overhanging side of the *"Plioden"* wreck, referred to as the *"hulk"*, which was beached beneath the seaward side of the island of Blakang Mati. There were anxious moments as aircraft circled above us, and the guns on the summit of Blakang Mati blazed away, making a frightful din without any end product. Then a more deafening noise as the aircraft dived over us to attack the defences.

Leaving the doubtful security of the hulk when things quietened down, Mossie put on his best speed of 8 knots and sped round the western corner of the island, and then east along the channel between the Keppel docks and Blakang Mati. Passing on the inside of Pulau Brani, an island at the eastern end of the docks, avoiding two Chinese junks, one listing steeply and one on fire, we hugged the coastline past Telok Ayer basin, the city water front Raffles quay and Collyer quay and headed for Tanjong Rhu a little further east.

I do not recall much (nor does my diary help) about that outward journey but I do remember in response to Mossie's *'quick Sparky grab this wheel'* I was fully occupied at *"Kulit's"* helm. He dashed off to do whatever it was leaving me wishing that one of the other sailors had been there - I didn't consider that I was one. I was out of my element steering a boat. (It had been Mossie's wish that I remained there with him in case of possible visual signals addressed to us.) Instead the hairs on the back of my neck seemed to be curling not being able to see what might be coming from my rear while my eyes wanted to see what was going on around me and not the direction of *'Kulit's'* bow.

When Mossie returned with John and took over, John and I then stationed ourselves on either side of the wheelhouse in the tiny bridge wings as lookouts - for what it was worth. Meanwhile Noel and George were in the engine room, Sniffy and Sandy in the tiny galley below the bridge making a meal. There were fires burning on the Fullerton Road as we passed Jardine steps and way beyond shells or bombs could be seen exploding in the direction of Orchard Road, or probably Fort Canning area. We did not know at that time that the Japanese were spreading





across the island having successfully crossed from the mainland on the night and day of February 8/9th.

We duly arrived at Tanjong Rhu, and after locating the 'Kepah' at her anchorage, we then towed her and made fast alongside the "Kulit". We then spent the rest of the day baling out, retrieving her little lifeboat from its stowage on the wharf, securing it on board, pumping fuel and water and numerous other necessary tasks. It was gaspingly hot work, slowed down too because of the need to keep taking cover against low flying attacking aircraft - not on us, but on what appeared to be a very knocked about and abandoned Kalang airfield behind us and a bit too near for comfort.

But despite a lot of coaxing and the pumping-up of compressed air bottles used for starting we finally had to accept that 'Kepahs'" engine was not going to start. I say "we" collectively, for I personally was not involved in the operation of actually starting the brute.

With the approach of sunset, and the very rapid transition from light to dark in that latitude there was no alternative but to cease our labours and stay where we were for the night and a very disturbed one too! Disturbed not only because of the noise of distant guns that seemed to be getting noisier, the huge canopy of red sky above us, and mosquitoes by the million, but because we had no knowledge of the form the Japanese advances had taken beyond what we could hear. We did not have a radio on the "Kulit" and portable transistor radios had not yet been invented. Mossie said that before we left Bukom, he had heard - from where I don't know because useful news didn't come over the radio, even if you had one - that the Japanese had also landed at Changi on 7/8th February, having previously occupied Pulau Ubin island in the mouth of the Johore strait (between Malaya and Changi).

It was with this information in mind plus the fact that the East Coast road from Changi ran directly past the Kalang basin and the Tanjong Rhu wharfs, a mere distance of 10 miles, that we felt that some precaution was necessary.

If the Japanese could move at speed all those miles right down the Malayan peninsula, what was a mere 10 miles! So, before sunset, we changed places with the 'Kepah", leaving her against the wharf and us, in the "Kulit", on her starboard side, thus facilitating our quick getaway should it be necessary. Added to that precaution, we split up the night hours into watches. Consequently, that night, on or off watch, my wakeful hours envisaged hordes of Japanese hotfooting it along the coast road in our direction.

So it was with relief when morning came, that there was no change in our immediate surroundings from the previous night. Here at Tanjong Rhu, we seemed to be so much part of the war, while at Bukom we enjoyed the role of spectators.



After renewed efforts to start the 'Kepah's' engine without success, we had downed tools and were preparing for a quick get-away and a dash back to base, when Mossie said, 'Right lads, get the tow-line fixed and we will tow her back to Bukom. I for one couldn't believe my ears. It seemed such a ludicrous suggestion ... . It spoke well for the feeling of well being that existed because the morning had only brought a hot sun, that there was not a single word of protest from anybody. After a delayed decision as to when it was expedient to depart, because of air raids and minor problems with "Kulits" compressor that had worked overtime charging up bottles for the 'Kepah', we eventually left at midday with John at 'Kepah's" helm. His only deck crew, Sandy, was at her bow taking care of the tow-line betwixt the two vessels, "Kepah" was pulled along at our best speed of something like walking pace. Had 'Kepah' had brakes like a car, the task would have been less eventful.

As it was, Sandy stationed on our stern, was kept busy protecting "Kulit's' propeller from the repeated slackening of the tow-line, due to hazards ahead.

The journey back past the city waterfront again was as depressing as our pace was worryingly slow, and I felt so naked out there on "Kulit's" tiny bridge wing. I don't know why I was out there other than as look-out for Mossie, but thinking about it, I don't suppose it would have mattered where any of us were on that small craft if we had been attacked. Nevertheless, I envied George and Sniffy Wilson on the "Kepah" as they disappeared from view down into the comparative but doubtful safety of the tiny engine room, and Noel into ours. Yet, at the same time there was Sandy looking quite unconcerned at "Kulit's" stern and John giving me a wave from 'Kepah's" helm and pointing to some activity ashore.

We turned the corner past Pulau Brani Island and heading up the Keppel docks 'straight', only to be looking skyward at stick of bombs falling towards us. It was either a wide miss on Blakang Mati or a near miss on the dock, and the 'Empire Star' that was taking on evacuees, but whatever it plopped into the channel just 100 yards ahead of us with a huge plume of white water. The shock wave and the swell that ensued seemed destined to separate us from our tow as both vessels bobbed "yukked and yawed" alarmingly.

Behind us a huge fire was blazing from a recent attack on a docks Godown, and there were dozens of helmeted figures scurrying about. Through the wheelhouse doorway Mossie blew out his cheeks and then followed that up with an eyebrow wipe.

After making fast beneath the comparative safety of the hulk, it was Mossie's decision that we rest awhile instead of continuing on at our snail-pace across the piece of open water between the hulk and Bukom. Not that continuing would be any less hazardous than hitherto, but somehow that open stretch of water looked uninviting.



The decision was accepted with enthusiasm, although it was open to conjecture whether or not it would be safer at that moment, or later.

But hardly had the conjecture been put into words, when the only two small craft in the immediate vicinity, less than a mile away, were attacked. One remained floating and one left burning fiercely.

The decision was immediate. We would stay where we were and think about it! Later that night as Mossie's whisky helped down the tea, and what food there was left over from the day before, it became quite noisy again as what sounded like depressed *ack-ack* guns blazed away over us and across the water to what appeared to be an enemy landing on the coast of Pasir Panjang, 3 miles or so west from our position.

There was some light relief as George produced the wind-up gramophone he had found on the 'Kepah' which wasn't easy to hear with the noise that was going on. It is just possible that our whisky intake made us appreciate one of the three records found. It was, 'oh what a wonderful night we've had tonight'.

Although we tried to pass away the dark hours cheerfully, it didn't cancel the thoughts that there could be other landings which led to another sleepless night. Although on and off watches were arranged, nobody really slept beyond frequent awakened dozes.

As the angry red reflected in the black smoke-laden sky over the city and beyond, paled with the advent of dawn light, fate that had been cursed with us at Tanjong Rhu surprised us. The "Kepah's" engine burst into life and sticking out of the engine hatch was George with a self-satisfied grin all over his face.

The rest of that day at Bukom was a busy one, which to a certain extent kept us from brooding too much on the activity, above and across the water. All the contaminated fuel was drained from the 'Kepah's' fuel tank, the water tank was drained and then filled with fresh water, then its only lifeboat re-slung more ship-shape and numerous other chores dealt with.

While Noel and Sniffy Wilson worked on the "Kulit's" malfunctioning compressor, the rest of us set about provisioning both vessels. From the Bukom club we 'acquired' dozens of tins of fruit and veg, numerous large hard plain biscuits, evaporated milk, and various utensils, and distributed them between the two vessels. In the past, we had enjoyed some very jolly times at the club, including singsongs around the piano, enjoyed by all. (Incidentally a pastime not often enjoyed by the young today.) Now the empty clubroom and bar looked forlorn.

In the mid-afternoon, Mossie returned from telephoning. He had not had any success in raising the chaps at the Marconi office for me, or the hospital concerning Captain Thomas, Watts and Arthur Greene. He intimated (but in my words now and not his) that there were not going to be

any "Jimmy Bloodso" heroics; the situation was far too grave and without a doubt, the vessels would not be required for running supplies. I learned later, that the idea had been abandoned as far back as February 4th. Whether the Super' had been made aware of this date before he delivered his pep talk and that what we had been doing to date was quietly preparing the vessels for an evacuation purpose without causing alarm and despondency, is more than likely. Hence the intimation we had grasped from his delivered rhetoric.

We were all very hot, tired and sitting down for a rest, suffering, I rather think, from dehydration and loss of sleep. In particular, because of our hitherto sedentary existence, we were very much out of condition which prompted John Wood to say that we would 'all be as fit as a bag full of fleas when this lot is over ...'

Up to the moment of Mossie's return, we had still been harbouring thoughts that what we were doing was going to be operationally useful. But with the increasing assault activity going on, and the previous night's experience while at the hulk common sense now prevailed and any lingering thoughts about the 'last battles' were as dead as a dodo. Since there was no official information and particularly at our location we were completely in the dark as to the overall situation and whether or not hoards of reinforcements were due. Hence our future action had to be, from necessity, a matter of using our heads and playing it by ear.

There had been a bevy of aircraft around and shrapnel had been descending from the spent ack-ack fire. Obviously what goes up must come down. After one lump had plopped down not very far from Shorty (who had just joined us) making a hole in an oil container as big as an apple, we were prompted to sit down under cover. It was Mossie's return that broke up our conversation which was mostly to do with "when do we start packing our grips and getting out of here...." Our last task had been to get a small launch, the 'Makota' ready. New batteries had been fitted, fuelled and provisioned, and she was as seaworthy as whatever sea she might be in would permit. We now assumed that that was our very last task, so it was with surprise that we heard Mossie say, 'Right, there's now the "Gewang" ...' This was another similar vessel to the 'Kulit' and tied up at the far end of Bukom's wharf.

Mossie wasn't too popular for a few moments for we just couldn't see any sense in any renewed activity in view of his earlier information. But as he pointed out, not only had we promised to get ALL these vessels seaworthy, but also he said, 'We now won't be the only ones needing a boat' - a typically Mossie altruistic remark that we couldn't argue about.

After hauling the "Gewang" from one end of the wharf, Volga boatman fashion to where the amenities were, she too reacted in the same way as the 'Kepah' at Tanjong Rhu. She refused to start, so we shelved that problem temporarily.

Like the remark I made about brakes on the towed "Kepah", the starting of those engines might have been easier if we could have tow-started like a car instead of fiddling about and exhausting air-bottles.

As Confucius might have said, 'Chinese men better at starting diesels than clever British engineers' which more or less would have confirmed Mossie's remark when he said that, 'If only Chung fu' (or whatever his Chinese engineer was called) 'had been here, we wouldn't have had all this trouble .."

Just after sunset, Mossie said, 'Okay chaps, let's go'.

I for one had a lovely thought, but a selfish one, forgetting momentarily about Arthur and the others in the hospital, and the office staff who were no doubt relying upon our assistance.

But what he meant was, let's go across to the hulk for the night. Earlier there had been several low flying aircraft nosing around the island and in Mossie's mind, as he explained, was the thought that the Japanese may do something to prevent any demolition work on the installation. For now, in the distance, Pulau Samboe was on fire and filling the sky with black smoke that was drifting over and joining that over the city. Soon it would be Bukom's fate.

It must have been the looks on our faces that prompted Mossie to give a fine portrayal of 'Any more for the Skylark. Nice trips round the hulk ..."

It had been Mossie's cheerful face and his refusal to show concern in some of our sticky or exasperating moments that had really kept us going in reasonable spirits. He was a great person and a perfect example of loyalty to a cause, yet ever kind and understanding to those around. It is with sadness that I recall now, that due to prevailing circumstances later, I wasn't able to say good-bye, (nor do I remember being concerned at the time as to where he was).

We lay alongside the hulk together with the launch 'Makota' that had followed in our wake. Counting the 'Kepah', 'Gewang" (whose engines we assumed would be made to operate when fresh air bottle supplies were applied) and the "Ribot" with Les Clayton, Shorty Armstrong and our elderly chief engineer off the 'Pinna' aboard, we were four vessels strong (plus the "Kulit") all fuelled up and supplies aboard ready for - what? When? And who?

Les Clayton with the "Ribot" and his crew were standing by ready to evacuate the Bukom installation staff and the demolition party just as soon as the 'scorched earth' policy was completed. This duly took place the following day.

We tucked in to our first meal since the previous day. Like a blind date in the darkness, we just opened tins and hoped for the best. This turned out to be an amazingly tasty soup of tomatoes, potatoes, sardines, peas and different sorts of fruit backed up with hard biscuits. We couldn't have enjoyed it more had we been at the Ritz. What it lacked, tea laced with whisky that



Mossie had acquired from the club, helped considerably. So much so that notwithstanding the anxious situation of the previous night, between watches, we managed to get some sleep.

Whether it was actually a quieter night, or whether the whisky made it seem so, I don't know. The last thing I remember as I lay on the deck was seeing the red sky above me and wondering if there had been as many mosquitoes the previous night.

*-- Next: Another Door Part 4: Escape to Sea The 'Pinna's' high-diving Sandy would stay with the 'Makota' and its passengers, George...*



# PHOTO ALBUM

I found this photo on the internet entitled 'A bow view of Minotaur-class cruiser HMS Superb' but I am not convinced it is of our cruiser. Does anyone have a view on this please?



# 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](#)



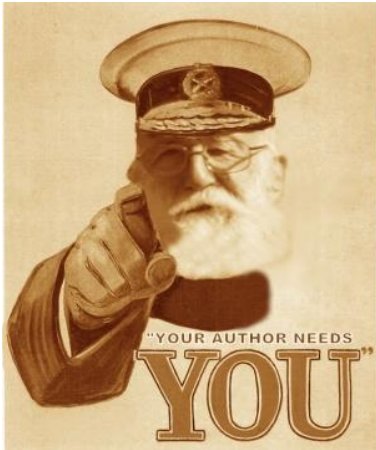
## Crossed the Bar (Recently Notified)

Robin Smith on 18<sup>th</sup> August





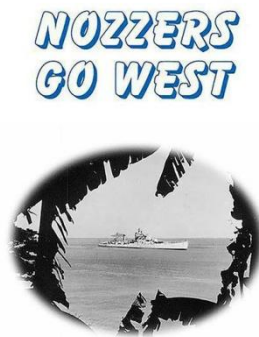
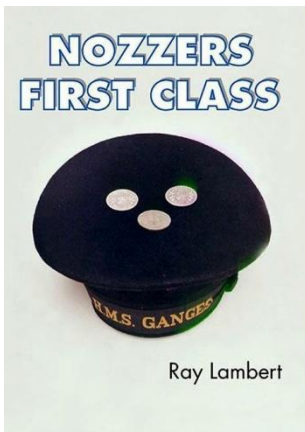
## Journalist & Best Selling Author



OUR IN-HOUSE **BEST SELLING AUTHOR** IS OFFERING THE FOLLOWING BOOKS AT A SPECIAL PRICE FOR MEMBERS OF THE ASSOCIATION.

### Ray Lambert

Follow the author when he was a handsome young man in *Ganges* and as he joins HMS Superb at Chatham. Go with him as he begins the "Luxury Cruise" of 1954-55. Join him from Punta Arenas to Vancouver and much in between. Learn of Guantanamo Bay and the Falklands before they became headline news. Each book costs £7.99 including UK postage. Click **HERE** for more information & to contact Ray by email



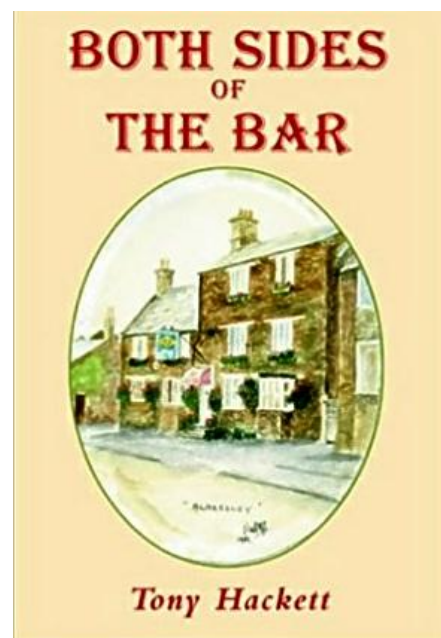
# Life After the Navy

## Tony Hackett

Tony, the son of a police officer, joined the Royal Navy aged 15 and spent the next 10 years travelling the world. He entered Civvy street in 1959 and went into the pub trade. This book relates Tony's endeavours in balancing his life between his love of rugby, managing often run-down pubs and his love of the sea and finally his successful ownership of his own free-house.

An interesting insight into the trials and tribulations of being self employed.

Available as a hard back book from Amazon at £12.99



## PEOPLE SEARCH FOR PEOPLE

If you can assist with any of these appeals please contact Brian Saunders in the first instance. No details will be passed on to third parties without express permission. These appeals will be left in the magazine for a few months

### From previous issues

A request from Guy Robinson as follows:- My Dad, **Christopher Robinson**, served as a midshipman on HMS Superb when he was around 20 years old, around 1949/50. He speaks fondly of HMS Superb. Does anyone by any chance remember him?

The son of **Jim (James) Johnstone** asks if anyone knew his father - a Royal Marine on the 1954-55 cruise

**Stoker Stephen (Steve) Maddison** (1946-47) and still going strong at 92 asks if anyone remembers him.

**Keith (Danny) Lambert** was a stoker on board the 1954-55 cruise and is looking for old oppos. Hopefully he will join the Association.

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The following message received from Derek Thompson, via Facebook

Just wondered if any of you gents knew my father **Derrick Thompson (Tommo)** he was a stoker mechanic (E) 1st class on board HMS Superb in 1955/56. He passed away in 2003 aged 72. I myself was in the Andrew and served for 23 yrs. I would be grateful if anyone knew him

Neil Cooper, the son of Terry Willey, writes

"My late father appears to be mentioned in the booklet from the 52-53 tour of West Indies. He's stated as leading electricians mate. His full name was **Terry Keith Willey**. Be great to hear from anyone who knew him"

Derek Baldry (Killick Sparker) would like to contact Ginger Dunne from 1956

Stoker Clive Godley would like to get in touch with old shipmates - I have his telephone number and email address so if you'd like it get back to me. (BS)

Larry Boudier who was in the Chatham field gun's crew in 1955 would like to know if anyone knows of others in that crew

Eleanor Ingalls Fochesato from New Jersey, USA would like to contact John Stevens, from the 1953 cruise to Maine, USA.

Bob Butcher known to many as "Butch" & who served on Superb between Nov 1950 to July 1951 wonders if Curly Watson is still around. He would like to make contact.

Laura Kardo researching her grandfather, Charles Harris, who served around 1951 & 1952. would like to know more about him.

Jeff , the son of Jim Stewart who was on board as a Telegraphist between 1947 & 1951, would be happy to receive any information re his dad. Jim was also on HMS Vidal in 1955



# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Thank you for your work, Brian. Much appreciated.

**Ray Lee**

Another top class rendition, Brian. Well done old matey (if I may call you that now you've taken over!). Keep up the good work. You're a hero.....

**Ray Lambert RN (tired)**

I'd just like to say how much I appreciate you giving me access to the mag. I very much appreciate it and enjoy looking through it. I hope that you are both well and managing to stay healthy. All the best and keep safe.

**Stan Townsend**

Hi Brian

Thanks for the magazine. So far so good here in Florida with COVID.

Take care.

**George & Jamie Messmer**



**THE END**