

The CACHALOT

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE SOUTHAMPTON MASTER MARINERS' CLUB

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Captain's Log

It is now five days since our long-suffering editor first reminded me about the Captain's Log, so I thought I had better get on with it. The old Flanders and Swann song went something like "in July the sun is hot; is it shining? No it's not". Well this July proved the song to be wrong, certainly for this part of the country. However, August has been rather damp so far. Perhaps our summer is over already. Let's hope not. We certainly would like a sunny day for our coach trip to Windsor on 7 September.

Our first social event since the last issue was the curry lunch at the Gurkha Kitchen on 22 May. Once again a very pleasant meal was enjoyed by all who attended.

Due to a hospital appointment we missed the Watch Ashore lunch on 27 May, but according to all reports the ladies enjoyed a delicious buffet in the Club.

On Wednesday, 2 June, I had the pleasure of presenting Mike Smith with his Bursary Certificate at a small ceremony in the Club. He is continuing his studies at Warsash and will hopefully achieve his Mate's certificate at the end of the year. We all wish him well for the future.

On the following Wednesday, 9 June we attended a reception on board the Trinity House vessel "Galatea" in Southampton. The weather was kind and we met up with many friends there, including one of our Stowaway members, Sir Malcolm Edge. The onboard staff were very attentive, and it was well nigh impossible to hold an empty glass.

The Shipping Festival at Winchester Cathedral took place on 17 June. The excellent Hampshire Constabulary Band provided the music this year and again the weather favoured us. So the congregation was able to enjoy the reception in the Deanery Garden afterwards. Here, I must express our gratitude to the ladies who kindly provided the "nibbles" at their own expense. Organised by Judith Peck this year they were of a very high standard. I believe that Carolyn Lee has volunteered to be organiser next June. She has a hard act to follow.

On Thursday 1 July we attended a reception given by the High Sheriff of Hampshire, Alan Lovell, and Mrs Lovell in the Palace Ruins at Bishop's Waltham. During the evening there was an all-too-short performance by the Winchester College Quiristers,

harking back to the days when Bishops of Winchester would stay at the palace and the Quiristers would be called upon to entertain them and their guests. The Quiristers were set up 600 years ago by William of Wykeham, and for those who may be interested, there is much information about them on the internet.

The following day, Friday, 2 July we attended a Club Supper in our Clubroom. The meal was delicious and we were well fed up, although not agreeably drunk as far as I could tell. After a bit of confusion with the power-point presentation equipment our speaker, Lionel Hall, entertained us with a talk entitled "A Laugh on the Ocean Wave".

About six weeks beforehand we had received an invitation to a Royal Garden Party at Buckingham Palace for 22 July. Accompanying the invitation were instructions about what to wear and what not to wear etc. As we approached the date this caused a great deal of concern as the weather forecast for the day predicted showers and sunny intervals. We travelled to London the previous day, with clothing for all events. However, surprise, surprise, the forecast was wrong and we enjoyed a sunny afternoon with cloudy intervals. During the afternoon I had a conversation with one of the Gentleman Ushers who, it transpired, was the nephew of another of our Stowaway members, Sir Morgan Morgan Giles, also a contributor to this publication.

Having been so late with my copy has enabled me to include one final occasion. Since the demise of our golfing section several years ago the Master Mariners' Golf Cup has sat unplayed for in our trophy cabinet. After due consideration the committee decided that it should be presented to the Southampton Shipping Golf Society. So on Wednesday, 18 August, David d'Arcy Hughes, the President of the Southampton Shipping Golf Society, accompanied by Roger Treherne, Vice-President, and David Corbett, Chairman, were invited to a buffet lunch at the Club. I duly presented the re-silvered and re-engraved cup to David d'Arcy Hughes who thanked the Club and said that it would be fought over every year. (*See the back page*)

We now have a small break until our next engagement which is the Merchant Navy Association Memorial Service at Holyrood on Sunday, 5 September at 1200. It would be great to see as many of our members as possible at that service.

Gerry Cartwright , Captain, The Cachalots

Boatsteerer's Locker

Welcome – Whilst we are now in a traditionally quiet period we have, since the June issue, been busy as you will see.

Business Southampton – You will recall from the last edition that the data gathering for the Maritime Integration Project was completed in May. Since then the data from the questionnaires has been processed, the results analysed and an extensive report that contains 150 pages and five A0 size maps has been produced. As you would expect there is a lot of information to assimilate and 'make sense of' which will take some time. Meanwhile I thought that a 'potted' version of the main points might be of interest:-

What does the map do?

1. The Solent Maritime Integration Project map is designed to provide a focal point and help prioritise maritime opportunities and issues in the Solent.
2. The map provides macro and micro levels of detail about the Solent Maritime cluster, the different identified Verticals and individual Participants' businesses and organisation,
3. The map is designed to present a platform for future continuous maritime improvement activity at the Solent, Vertical and individual company level.

Executive Summary

- The Solent Maritime cluster is a significant driver of economic activity,
- The Solent Maritime region represents significant economic activity in terms of sales and purchases to/from and in/out of the Solent,
- The Participating companies employ significant numbers of people within the Solent region,
- There are significant opportunities to increase the potential for local sourcing within the Solent,
- The Solent should be seen in the context of its contribution to the UK wide economy and significance in terms of buying from and selling to,
- There are only a small number of common customers and suppliers between all participants suggesting individual supply chains are not integrated,
- Participants who have HQs outside the Solent buy more from the Solent than Solent based companies and organisations,
- Traditional Maritime "verticals" sell to and procure from non Maritime verticals,
- There are a number of World leading businesses and organisations in the Solent within different Verticals who could be engaged to champion local issues and provide access to other markets for local suppliers.

Key Facts and Figures

- The survey has identified over 500 different customers and suppliers related to the Solent region and participating companies,
- 86 different participants identified 280 key customers and 197 key suppliers in the process across eight different verticals,
- The Turnover of participating companies is £2.7 Billion,
- Participants sold £1.9 Billion to identified customers,
- Participants sold £250 Million to the Solent,
- Participants procured £560 Million, -£321 Million was from outside the Solent,
- Participants procured £386 Million from identified suppliers, - £242 Million from outside of the Solent,
- Participating companies employ over 19,000 people.

Whilst the above gives a brief overview and provides some previously unknown interesting information, it is quite difficult

to identify, within the results, any benefits that may accrue directly to say, small and medium sized maritime businesses. So what are we going to do with the results? Firstly of course we have to submit a report to the sponsoring companies and reach agreement on how to proceed. Without trying to pre-judge the content of that report or the results of the meeting that will follow there is a range of activities that could be considered:-

1. Prioritise and develop Solent strategy for each vertical,
2. Develop support activities to improve and maximise local spend and content,
3. Make Solent companies aware of local market opportunities,
4. Align "Other" companies with Solent and Maritime activities as an attractive market place,
5. Engage "buyers" in local sourcing activities,
6. Develop strategy to encourage companies to consider the Solent as an attractive base to locate and do business from,
7. Build relationships with Participants and support business development activities,
8. Develop support strategies for key markets Solent companies are selling to,
9. Identify specific supply chain projects with key participants e.g. Collaboration,
10. Consider wider issues of infrastructure and transport identified by participants.

Southampton Shipowner's Association – Ivor Salter and I assisted the crews of two ships to give youngsters a taste of life at sea – (see article on page 4)

Club Future

Most of your officers non day to day activities are now mainly related to managing the impending transition to operating without our own Clubroom but with a suitable office and since the last edition we have:-

1. Now received two offers from the Southampton Seafarers Centre, one for a generously reduced rent for the Clubroom after the 31st July 2011 and secondly a good rent for the office space on the 2nd floor also after the 31st July 2011. This offer is being considered and, because even with the reduced rent being offered we cannot afford to maintain the Clubroom, we continue to list those establishments that we could use as lunch/ evening time venues. Currently this list includes:

- The Cotswold Hotel. (Portsmouth).
- The Dolphin Hotel. (Below Bar).
- The Royal Southampton Yacht Club. (Ocean Village).
- The Elizabeth House Hotel. (The Avenue)
- The Park Hotel. (On the Park adjacent to the old Polygon).

Whilst it is too early to negotiate specific terms for next summer and beyond it is useful to develop a list of venues that comply with our basic criteria with a view to establishing a choice for members.

- 2 We now have a computerised list of all our books, cap badges, pictures and shields (Word) which will be valued and put on the web site. We have been advised that some of the books we have may be valuable and correspondingly the Executive and Finance Committee have made a change to the method of their disposal, namely: no books, pictures, models, shields etc. will be disposed of until we have received a valuation for them. Obviously any member that has donated any of these is welcome to reclaim them at any time before 1st January 2011, after which they too will be disposed of. Our thanks to Hamish, Reg, Andrew and Richard for all the effort that they have put in.

On a lighter note

Seen in a Cambridgeshire local newspaper was the latest apparent evidence of sexual equality, or is it bureaucratic madness? :-

"£3,000.00 is the amount that the Cambridgeshire police were planning to spend on 380 *Shewees*. These are plastic funnels that allow women to urinate like men."

Good luck girls!!

George Angas. Boatsteerer.

You might still be just in time to book a lick of the spoon at the

CURRY LUNCH
At the
Gurkha Kitchen
Saturday 4th September
£11.50 each

1200 for 1230

If not, you will definitely have time to put your name down for the final one this year
On **Saturday 16th October**

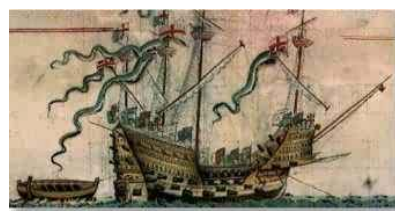
AUTUMN DINNER DANCE
Saturday 9th October
RAF Yacht Club, Hamble

Wild Mushroom Soup
Leg of Lamb with
Apricot, Orange & fresh Rosemary Stuffing
& Red Wine Jus
Glanarchan Raspberry Whiskey Torte
Coffee & Mints

Music by
Twilight

Priced at **£35** per person.
Black Tie,
1915 for 2000.

This event re-scheduled from 15th May
Further details from the office and on our website
<http://www.cachalots.org.uk>



A
Club Supper
will be held in the Club Room
on **Friday 17 September**
The Guest Speaker will be
Mr Trevor Sapey
from the Mary Rose Trust
He will give a presentation on
The History and Sinking of
The Mary Rose

Warm
Mushroom & Gruyere
Tart

Roast Beef
with Mustard Gravy

Brandy Snap Baskets
with Fruit & Ice Cream

Coffee & Mints

Catering by John Davis

£25 per person

Numbers will be strictly limited
to 33 on a first come basis.

Perish the thought, but Christmas is already looming on the horizon and it's time to remind you of the Christmas Lunch on Saturday 4th December and the Dinner the following week on the 11th. By the next edition it may be too late.

Both to be held at King's Court in Chandlers Ford with the usual, traditional menu priced at **£25** per head, a slight but less than inflationary increase on last year and still excellent value.

Remember that the dinner is a black tie function.



SOUTHAMPTON SHIPOWNERS' ASSOCIATION – THE CACHALOTS

OAKWOOD JUNIOR SCHOOL- SHIP VISITS

Introduction

You will have read from my reports in previous editions of the Cachalots that we had offered to assist members of the SSA to help maintain and develop their programme of ship visits which they started last year for children from the Oakwood Junior School. On Monday and Tuesday the 28th and 29th June 2010 the Ships Whitchallenger (Whitaker Tankers) and the Apex (Solent Towage) were alongside 22 Berth waiting to host 30 young school children.

What's the difference between a ship and a boat mister?

Imagine thirty youngsters turning up at the gangway to see your ship!! Blind panic and total chaos? No, not at all. Ashley Jenkins and Nick Jefferies had arranged to have their ships and crews all ready and organised to receive them. Ivor Salter and I were there to help. Ivor in his masters uniform and me with my Athel line tie on (my uniform had long since fallen prey to voracious moths!) joined the crews of the ships and agreed how we were going to keep them occupied. These visits followed last year's successful formula and the children were split into five groups of six each with their own teacher in attendance except for one group that I looked after (only four teachers). Five specific areas of focus had been arranged. For'd Stbd was the knots and splices department. Stbd aft was the cargo handling and pollution prevention with booms and dispersants. The bridge was the third where the Captain and Ivor showed them how to manage the navigation, communications and remote control of the engine room and propulsion units. Port aft was the fire prevention and fighting zone where to the amusement of the children the more adventurous of the groups donned SCBA and fire protection suits and clutched heavy fire hoses and nozzles. The fifth and final visit was to the tug Apex that lay alongside the Whitchallenger and the crew gave them a guided tour of this most magnificent vessel.

It was not a totally one sided process and upon arrival on board the children were given, together with lime green baseball caps and model ships from WMA, a questionnaire containing 31 questions. We made sure that all the questions were covered in the different sections and an answer sheet was given to each teacher to take back to the school and correct the children's' answers. International code flags were flying and stapled to each questionnaire was a sheet identifying all the code flags so that the children could work out what was being said. Half way round we stopped for cool drinks in the shade of the flying bridge. One or two were feeling the heat and needed the rest. One particular girl of between 10 & 12 years of age called May had a metal calliper on her leg. Apparently she is normally confined to a wheel chair. For this visit the wheelchair was nowhere to be seen. She managed the gangway at both high and low water with no complaint and our concerns for her safety were unnecessary. Never once did she complain and she did not miss a trick. What a lovely, bright, determined young girl!

Before we knew it, it was 12:45hrs and time for them to go, three hours had flown by. There was one last treat in store however and whilst they all lined up on the port side of the Whitchallenger, the engineers of the Apex started up the fire monitor pump and put on a demonstration of water power that none of them had seen before. Quite a finale and after they disembarked with many grateful thanks (they all wanted to say goodbye to the Captain!) and went back to their school both ships and crews calmly went back to their day jobs secure in the knowledge that for three hours under clear blue skies and with mirror like seas they had entertained, interested, absorbed, yes and maybe even inspired thirty lucky youngsters who had been given a rare insight into life at sea today.



Thanks mister

The SSA is to be congratulated. With all the commercial and H&SE pressures of today they organised and coordinated this event, even down to contributing to the transport cost because the school budget could not manage it. "From small acorns....."

This is a start; surely with all our experience and such supportive employers we can take this forward and begin to show our community what a fantastic career opportunity the shipping and maritime industry can provide.

One of my group, a regular little cheeky chappie said to me on leaving: "My dad was at sea and you said what he said so you must be right. – ***Thanks mister.***"

George Angas

"One Volunteer is worth"

For many years, throughout the United Kingdom, the "Sailors' Society" enjoyed the support and friendship of bands of willing volunteers who formed themselves into "Guilds" and who, by their fundraising for and assistance to seafarers, contributed significantly to the work of the Society locally and nationally.

Today, sadly, there is only one surviving Guild - in Southampton - and even this band of dedicated men and women is struggling to survive...

Recently, at a meeting of one of our Committees it was said that it would take only one dedicated person to re-establish a Guild - and someone commented "Better a Volunteer than three pressed men".

Where, I wondered, did that saying originate.

Over the centuries many measures were taken to ensure that ships of the Royal Navy were adequately manned. Some were legal, many were quasi-legal and most were abused by those appointed to enforce them. Broadly speaking, all of the legislation allowed for "eligible men of seafaring habits between the ages of 18 and 45" to be liable for "impressment" - compulsory service in naval ships.

A first-rate ship of the line carried a crew of almost 800 and, at Trafalgar, Nelson's "Victory" included more than 600 "pressed men" in her complement. In time of war the need was great and men had to be found so some 40 "impressment" depots were established.

These organisations were known as Impress Services. Each depot was under the control of an RN Captain (usually one that was not entrusted with a seafaring command) and the "press gang" comprised thugs and vagabonds known as "gangers" who could be depended upon to come up with adequate numbers of "eligible men" albeit many who had never seen a ship in their lives. Men in the street would be accosted and invited to volunteer for service at sea and, if they refused, they were either rendered unconscious by a blow on the head or, less frequently, the liberal application of strong ale in an adjoining tavern.

If the unfortunate wretch could be persuaded to "volunteer" for the navy and accept the "Kings Shilling" he was rewarded with a sum of money which, when he boarded his first ship, was immediately recovered from him to pay for a hammock, bedding and clothes.

This acceptance of money meant that most seafarers were classed as "volunteers" and this gave rise to the expression "Better a volunteer than three pressed men" as, presumably their suitability for shipboard service was greater than those who were hit over the head and carried aboard! The gangers were well rewarded and their earnings were supplemented by accepting bribes from those in the street who could afford to pay to be released from their clutches. In many instances the endeavours of the press gang were thwarted by the intervention of other citizens and many a mini-riot resulted from their attempts to make up their numbers.

Unfortunately, merchant ships were an adequate source of qualified seafarers and many a seaman arriving in a United Kingdom port after months and years away was denied a much longed-for reunion with his family when the press gang was sent aboard his ship. In many instances ships in port and at anchor were raided by the press gangs and although it was ruled that the ship must be left with "sufficient seafarers to navigate safely" this was seldom done. Many merchant Captains provided hideaways for their crew to shelter in when the press gang boat was seen to be in the vicinity but this afforded little protection from the ruthless and heavily armed thugs. Seafarers on foreign flag ships were often open to impressment and American seamen were particularly at risk because of their ability to speak and understand English.

Selected UK citizens - shipwrights and most of the seafarers engaged in the whaling trade, to mention but two categories - were issued with documentation known as "Protections Tickets, granted by The Lord High Admiral and issued at the Customs House which entitled them to exemption from impressment but these afforded scant protection and, indeed, when the manning situation was dire this protection was withdrawn officially.

Many magistrates sentencing men to a long term of imprisonment for very minor crimes offered the accused an opportunity to serve His/Her Majesty at sea rather than serve a prison sentence and many took advantage of this generosity only to regret it many times in the years ahead.

In an effort to regularise the supply of naval seafarers, in 1795 Pitt introduced two "Quota Acts" laying down the number of men that each county had to supply - based on its population and the number of ports contained therein. London had to supply 5700 and Yorkshire a mere 1100. In an effort to meet their quota many counties offered a seafaring bounty but when this proved inadequate local magistrates were instructed to increase sentences and then offer the accused the possibly more attractive option of serving aboard a warship - and, if they survived, a pension at the end of their service.

In 1815, at the end of the Napoleonic Wars, impressment ended "officially" but even as late as 1835 there were isolated instances of impressing although, by that time, the length of service of a pressed man could not exceed five years.

It is said that the Impress Act has never been repealed and that it is still lawful to impress men for naval service but, at the outbreak of World War 1, and thereafter in wartime, conscription ensured that Royal Naval ships were adequately manned.



**Continuing Chapter 14 of “The Unforgiving Minute”,
the personal memoirs of Stowaway Member
Rear Admiral Sir Morgan Morgan-Giles.**

Tito was advised at GHQ that it was obviously not really possible to control a movement as large as his from the back of a mule, wandering around in the forests. He also realised that if his Partisan supporters learned that he had left Yugoslavia, the morale of his movement would suffer a deadly blow. It was therefore arranged that Tito should come to the island of Vis, which was really the only part of Yugoslavia territory firmly held and defended.

On 6th June I received a signal that a destroyer, HMS Blackmore, would come to Komiza at midnight, the first time any destroyer had done so. I was to meet a VIP. I went to meet the ship at midnight: Down went the gangway and out walked Marshal Tito and his staff - including his famous guard-dog Tiga that went everywhere with him. He was welcomed and moved straight up to temporary HQ in a cottage in the village of Borovik.

This was the first time I had actually seen Tito. He was a stocky well-built man, spoke practically no English, but it must be said was a figure of enormous charisma. As I have already explained, Fitzroy Maclean was his contact with Churchill and the Allies. There is a story that during the summer of 1944 Fitzroy took him to Caserta to visit the headquarters of the Allied Mediterranean Command. Tito insisted on being accompanied by six of his own personal bodyguard, all carrying tommy guns. This ruffled feathers a bit at GHQ as one can imagine, but it had to be accepted. Tito was also accompanied by his dog Tiga. As it was described to me the first meeting between Tito and Churchill lost some dignity because just as the two great men advanced to shake hands, a furious dog fight took place between Tito's dog and a little dog which belonged to GHQ!

Tito wore a magnificent grey uniform covered with gold laurel leaves and a very ornate military cap. This splendid uniform had been provided for him by the Russian Government, and somebody once ruefully remarked that this clever idea did more to influence Tito than all the supplies which had been provided by the Allies!

This book is not the place to enlarge on Tito's life history. But briefly he had been born in Croatia, apprenticed as a metal worker, drafted into the Austrian Army, left for dead on a battlefield with a lance through his shoulder, captured by the Russians and taken to Moscow. For a decade he lived in Russia and became a fully indoctrinated Communist. Eventually he was sent back to Yugoslavia as the head of the then illegal Communist Party in that country. He spent years in various disguises and aliases creating an underground Communist apparatus. When the Germans invaded Yugoslavia in 1941 Tito lay low and did nothing. Only a couple of years later he began to activate his Communist Partisan Movement. Yugoslavs throughout their country, Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, Bosnians, Montenegrans, all joined Tito's Resistance Movement. It was a measure of his greatness that he managed to weld all these disparate people into working together to drive out the invaders.



Tito

It is not too much to say that during the war Fitzroy Maclean created Tito - and Tito was well aware of this. They remained friends throughout the rest of their lives.

Vis Island has many historical associations for the British. The island itself is enormously attractive - like all the Dalmatian islands. In the Napoleonic wars it was much used by Admiral Hoste, who spent several years campaigning in the area. His most successful

battle was the Battle of Lissa in 1811 - Lissa is the ancient name for the island. Evidence of past British history is easy to find. Fort George which guarded the entrance to Vis harbour is an old English one, and over the gate can be seen the carved Union Jack and the words "George III by the Grace of God King of England, Scotland, Ireland and of the British Dominions beyond the seas".

Two other forts crowned heights near Vis harbour - Fort Wellington and Fort Bentinck. Down near the water's edge and just outside the town is an old British cemetery commemorating those who fell in naval actions off the island - particularly the famous frigate action in which Hoste routed a greatly superior Franco-Venetian force. A small island in the mouth of Vis harbour is still called Hoste Island.

The British occupied these forts from 1812 to 1815, but when the island was handed over to the Austrians the forts were destroyed. Only Fort George was later rebuilt. But, as General Tom Churchill writes "When we, in 1944, once more returned to the island with British soldiers, it was pleasant to see the Union Jack waving over the battlements".

There is an extraordinary similarity between the type of operations carried out by Hoste and those carried out by British forces 130 years later.

By mid-summer of 1944 there were some 6000 British forces in the garrison, plus about twice as many Partisans altogether. Military activity was very intense. Apart from the various raids, some of which will be described later, there was very active training both for the defence of the island and for offensive operations.

There was, for example, a somewhat grandly named "Balkan School of Artillery" run by Major Geoffrey Kupp. Some small transportable 3.7 inch Howitzers or "Mountain Guns" had been supplied to the Partisans. Their men would be trained in the use of these weapons, then Dakota aircraft would land on the newly-built short strip and the guns (similar to the guns in the Earls Court Royal Tournament) would be loaded into the aircraft. A number of mules would be leg-roped and dragged up wooden boards into the aircraft, plus ammunition and Partisan guncrews. Then the aircraft would take off and fly to some improvised airstrips in the areas held by the Partisans in the interior of Yugoslavia. The enemy would thus be confronted with artillery fire instead of just a band of desperadoes.

Gradually during the summer Allied air activity had greatly increased due to the establishment of the so-called "Balkan Air Force" under Air Marshal Sir William Elliott on the Italian mainland in the Foggia area. Day after day our bombers could be seen high overhead on their way to attack such places as the Ploesti oilfield in Romania. Before long an airstrip was constructed on the island by the Royal Air Force, with specialised assistance from an American Airfield Construction Unit. This was achieved in a very short time. The site was suitably flat and hundreds of Partisans assisted by rooting up the vineyards which had, in past years, always grown the best wines and provided the real wealth of the island. Vis became a useful emergency landing strip for any of our bombers who had been damaged or were short of fuel etc.

My personal memories are very vivid. One huge Liberator crash-landed in the sea outside Komiza harbour. Its crew were rescued. On another occasion I was crossing the Adriatic in a high-speed motor launch (designed for landing agents etc), when another Liberator parted from its formation and glided down and crashed in the sea only a mile or two away from us. We dashed over and found a lot of floating wreckage, particularly I remember two huge wheels which had broken loose from the undercarriage. We were able to rescue the crew, but it was a tremendous struggle to pull these men out of the water and in over the side of the launch - their fur-lined flying clothing held so much water. I said to the pilot who I remember was wearing a 'lucky' rabbit's foot hanging from his belt "I bet you were glad to see us before you crashed". He said "No, we didn't see you at all. It was just luck that we came down where we did".

At a later stage a small detachment of RAF Hurricanes was located on the strip in Vis. This was not so much for the defence of the island, because enemy air strength had greatly dwindled, but the Hurricanes were very useful to attack "targets of opportunity" whenever possible.

To be continued

Dredgings from the Memory of an Electrical Superintendent

Edward Hunter is an Electrical Engineer who, following an apprenticeship with Harland & Wolfe, went to sea with Royal Mail, Atlantic Steam and Canadian Pacific. After a period ashore working with various companies he was, in 1970, recruited by Sealink as Electrical Superintendent and held that position until retiring in '90.

Eddie is the Membership Secretary of The Seven Seas Club and these tales from his time with Sealink first appeared in the Spring 2005 edition of The Seven Seas Magazine.

Immunity

When I first joined the Company, its official name was "The Shipping and International Services Division of British Rail." The name "Sealink" referred to a partnership involving Dutch, Belgian and French interests together with British Rail, while the Shipping and International Division itself was an amalgam of the old railway region shipping interests.

Southern Region owned a ship repair yard and dry dock at Southampton, and before it was closed in the late 1960s its manager was Mr Ronald Plews. After its closure, Mr Plews joined the headquarters staff of the shipping division, then based in Hamilton House, Liverpool Street. He was given special responsibility for the annual dry docking of the division's ships at one or other of the British ship repair yards. Given his vast experience, Mr Plews could price a damage repair to the penny, which made him the scourge of ship repair managers the length and breadth of the country. During dry dock inspections, it was common for ship repair managers to examine underwater damage and suggest,

"Crop out and renew, Mr Plews?" But, where his repair budget was involved, old Plews was as tight as a duck. Mr Plews would remove his pipe, shake his head and insist upon the cheaper option. "No, no! That will fair in place alright." Indeed, he said this so frequently that he became known to all and sundry as "Fair-in-place Plews."

My first visit to a docking was when the M.V. *Suffolk Ferry* went to John Redhead's repair yard in Sunderland. Mr Plews was Dry Dock Superintendent. Owners' visiting Superintendents and stray Board of Trade Surveyors were entertained to luncheon each day in the directors' dining room. In the middle of the long refectory type table stood a large polished wooden box with brass corners and a brass lined slot in the top — the swear box. Each new visitor was introduced to the custom and regulations governing the swear box by his host.

"Mr. Hunter, welcome to the dining room - that's the swear box. In this room swearing is forbidden in all its forms, we do not talk about the job and we do not mention politics or religion. All right?" said my host, the Yard's Electrical Manager.

"Understood," I said, wondering how my colleague Mr. Plews would fare. As we would be there for a fortnight, I expected him to be bankrupt, or at least to have to settle his swear box account with a credit card. My host went on to explain that it was advisable to carry a slack handful of pennies as the fine for an offence was 2p, or the offender's nearest equivalent coin of *higher* denomination - and change was not given.

"This is Mr. Hunter, British Rail's Electrical Superintendent, here with the *Suffolk Ferry*" my host introduced me to the already assembled company. He produced four penny coins and deposited them with a flourish in the swear box. "Your first two

contributions Mr. Hunter," he explained. "After this, you're on your own."

Mr. Plews came in. He hung his hard hat and dirty dry dock mackintosh on the pegs by the door and came to the table rubbing his hands to warm them.

"It's damn cold in that dry dock," he complained.

"Tuppence in the box please, Mr. Plews," demanded the managing director from the head of the table, causing a laugh.

"What? Oh, hell, I forgot," said Plews.

"Another tuppence, Mr Plews!"

With feigned bad grace Mr. Plews deposited four coins and sat down. The fare at the table was excellent, a good wholesome warming soup, followed by a choice of two meat dishes and winter vegetables that would not have been out of place in the dining room at the Ritz. Then came a choice of cheese and biscuits or a hot sticky pudding and copious quantities of tea or coffee.

While helping himself to vegetables, with awkward implements held clumsily in still frozen hands, Mr Plews accidentally dropped some boiled cabbage on the table.

"Damn!" he said, not quite under his breath.

"Tuppence in the box, please, Mr. Plews."

For the next two or three days, Mr. Plews was clearly on his very best behaviour and received no demands from the head of the table for swear box contributions. Perhaps I should explain that the swear box was emptied periodically, and its contents donated to charity (never I hoped to the RSPCA). When the charitable purpose of the swear box was explained to me I expressed my anti RSPCA view.

"What's your objection to animals then?" I was asked.

"Well, it has always annoyed me that we have a damned *Royal* society for animals but a mere *National* society for the prevention of cruelty to children."

"Tuppence in the box there, please, Mr. Hunter."

I complied at once. (I don't know what happened to my two "free" offences.) "And another tuppence for expressing a political opinion!"

"Am I allowed to talk about football?" I asked, even though I don't like the game. "Good heavens, no," I was told. "Religion is strictly forbidden."

On Friday morning, Mr. Plews was in a very bad mood. A large cruise liner had arrived for an emergency docking and the dry dock work on our own ship had ground almost to a halt whilst labour was diverted to the unexpected arrival. Knowing that he would get a hard time the repair manager, Mr. George, had been carefully avoiding Mr. Plews all morning. And to exacerbate matters, several good fitters and electricians had also been whipped away from the BR ship. Well, talk about red rag and bull. .

Mr. Plews fumed and searched everywhere for Mr. George, even to the extent of visiting the cruise ship and going down two neighbouring dry docks. So, cold wet and very angry, he arrived in the dining room for lunch.

"Where the hell is that Billy George?" he demanded loudly.

"Tuppence, please, Mr. Plews"

"What? Oh, yes."

Tuppence clinked into the swear box.

"Something upsetting you Mr. Plews?" the MD asked, with a sly grin.

"Yes, there bloody well is!" Plews exploded.

"Tuppence!"

"What? Oh, yes." Another two coins clinked into the box. "Where is that bloody man? He's damn well avoiding me deliberately."

"Four pennies, please Mr. Plews."

Sensing combustion and fireworks, the assembled company ceased their individual conversations to pay attention to the exasperated Mr. Plews. Billy George came in and took a seat well away from Mr. Plews.

"Oi! No you don't, you come and sit here -I want words with you."

"Er, something wrong Mr. Plews?" Billy George feigned innocence.

"Wrong! Wrong! Hell, man, you know damned well what's wrong..."

"Fourpence, please, Mr. Plews."

"You've taken all the best bloody workmen for that bloody gin palace, that's what's wrong!"

"Eight pence, please, Mr. Plews."

Plews was by then brick red in the face, his eyes bulging, and his walrus moustache bristling. He stood up, pulled a ten pound note from his pocket, waved it at the amused managing director, folded it roughly and posted it in the swear box.

"How much blasted immunity does that buy me?" He demanded.

Fair that in place.

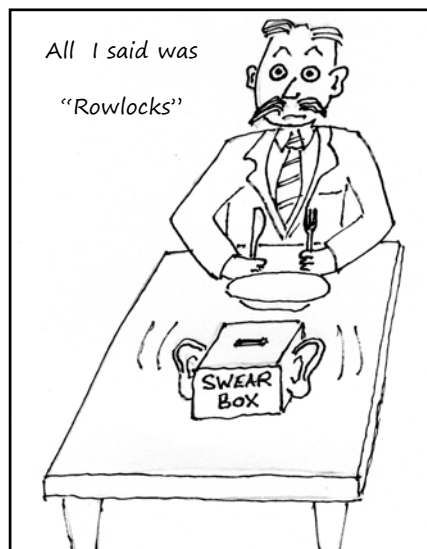
So much for Mr Plews in the yard dining room, but on the dock bottom he was more formidable and the dreaded scourge of Ship Repair Managers from the Tyne right round to the Clyde. Because of their constant to-ing and fro-ing ferries accumulate a lot of superficial dents to their shell plating and in removing these the yard sought a profit. Mr Plews was more than a match for them.

"Cut that one out, Mr Plews?"

"No, no. That can be faired in place." And it invariably could be, too.

A ship romantically named *Sea Freightliner 1* was round in the Company's one small remaining dry dock at Holyhead, Mr Plews in charge. The job was going well, and, trusting our own dry dock staff rather more than he would any other dry dock bunch, Mr Plews allowed himself to go home to Winchester for the weekend, leaving on an early train. One of the dock staff, Evan Evans, a steel fighter returning to work after the lunch break, spent most likely enjoying a hydraulic lunch in the nearest watering hole, missed his footing and fell straight down the dry dock. The poor fellow mangled a leg very badly in the fall.

In the local A and E Hospital, the orthopaedic consultant, Mr Jones the Bones, examined the casualty and sucked his



teeth and shook his head gravely and summoned Dr Jones the Gas.

"Is it bad, then?" Evans the Steel, who was still conscious, asked weakly.

"Bad? Oh, very bad. I'm afraid it will have to come off, Evan boyo," Jones the Bones told him sadly. "Prepare him for theatre, Sister."

On Monday afternoon, when he returned, Mr Plews was told of the dry dock tragedy. He promptly commandeered the local Shipping and Port Manager's car and driver and went to visit the unfortunate victim in the hospital.

Evan Evans woke from a slight doze as Mr Plews walked down the ward.

"Ah, Mr Plews," Evans said. "Pity you wasn't here, sir, you would have made them fair the bugger in place."

Harbour Stand-by

Harbour Stand-by was a right pain for the Day Workers on the Harwich-Hoek Passenger Ferries, which sailed from Parkeston Quay at 11.00 hours, arrived at the Hoek-van-Holland at 18.00, sailed again at 22.00 and berthed again at Parkeston at 06.30 next morning. Harbour Standby was usually about an hour-and-a-half to two hours, which meant that the Old Man was up top and the Chief GingerBeer was down below at least six to eight hours, and twice at quite "unsociable hours." I mean, who in his right mind actually wants to be in a wheelhouse or in an engine room until after midnight and again at 04.45?

And I haven't mentioned fog or bad weather stand-by which could and did occur. The Ship's Electrician, a Day Worker, was also expected to turn-to leaving and entering harbour, his stand-by station being the main switchboard in the engine control room. Down below, stand-by was always a fairly relaxed social sort of time, although the men in the white boiler-suits were always alert to the myriad changes that took place in an engine room on passage and always responded instantly to any unusual event.

Towards the end of their training, the Company used to send Apprentice Shipwrights, Fitters, Plumbers and Electricians to sea for six weeks or so while the technical colleges were closed for the summer. The Apprentices, of course, were treated as Day Workers. I had been on the continent, visiting a ship repair yard and was returning on the night crossing from the Hoek. We had an electrical apprentice on board gaining his sea experience. The Ship's Electrician was Doug Clothier. The Chief Engineer was a Welshman called Gordon Roberts, a very senior Chief and certainly nobody's fool.

Harbour Stand-by was at 05.00 and only the apprentice was adrift. 05.05 ... 05.10 passed - no sign of him. Just after 05.12 the control room door opened and the bleary-eyed apprentice entered. Mr Roberts turned round slowly in his swivel chair.

"Er, that grill in the crew galley is all right now, Doug," the apprentice announced in a loud voice.

The Welsh eyes twinkled in suppressed amusement as Mr Roberts said, "Nice try, son."

More of Eddie's dredgings in future editions.

THE BATTLE OF SC 94

By

Commander R G Sheffield OBE VRD* RNR



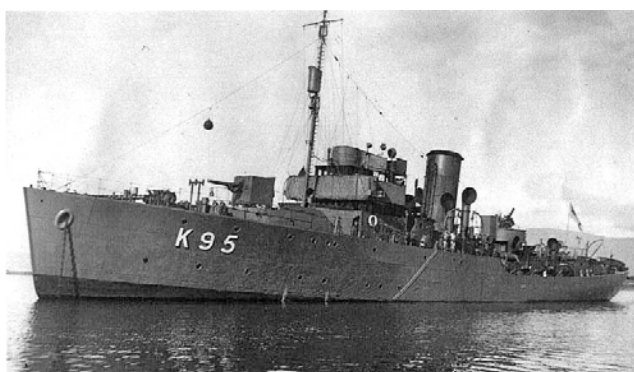
8th August 1942 (cont) By 1600 all escorts had rejoined the convoy, which was once again steaming along in good order. Life on board was cramped, and in a couple of days we were down to hard tack, i.e. teeth-breaking ship's biscuits. The other escorts were no better off.

The *BROKE* joined in the "first dog", having spent the afternoon giving a submarine a pasting which had no doubt been caught napping looking in our direction. Although it was grand to have a destroyer back in the escort, she arrived with that usual superior look destroyers always put on when in company with corvettes, this one being particularly superior having a Commander in command. She raced over to the starboard bow and dropped a depth charge to impress everyone, and then sidled over to *PRIMROSE* for a chat and to take over command; as she did so a raucous voice from aft shouted, "Yer too late, mate - we dropped one in that corner last week!" A very pained looking Commander surveyed our scruffy, rusty looking vessel with its untidy crew of ruffians (of course, made more impressive by the Greeks) and loftily announced that all would now be well. Admiralty spoilt that somewhat by signalling 20 or more U-boats estimated to be in our area!

During the "dogs" four survivors had died. Just an hour before that they had been talking, warm and dry, under blankets in bunks. They just simply died from too much war. I remember watching three ratings, all from the *HEBRIDES*, getting them ready for burial aft on the deck just for'ard of the depth charge rails. The three men were quiet and dignified, and in that crowded ship, garbed and ready for instant action, it was a place of great peace. It is amazing how the Almighty takes a hand at times in the affairs of man. The bodies were laid out in a row, clean and naked; each corpse had cottonwool bandaged in place over the eyes; the arms were folded over the chest and tied in place with more bandage; solid shot (practice shells) were put between the thighs and legs and fixed in place with more bandage; then, carefully and neatly, each body was sown up into a hammock, placed on a plank and covered with a White Ensign. I gave no orders, for none were needed. I knew my job would be writing the letters. As I looked, without sentiment or sorrow, at a task that had to be done, I remember thinking, "This is me. What have I become?"

At 1800 the ship was stopped. None minded the risk being taken. I read the burial service, then the bodies were slid over the side from under the Ensigns as the inboard end of the planks were lifted and I watched them plummeting straight down into the clear, clean depths of the Atlantic until they were out of sight. For one very brief moment there was peace. Then the "carry on" was piped, the ship gathered way, and we went back to war without a backward look for four men who might never have existed.

At 1944 *DIANTHUS* sighted a U-boat on the surface and was despatched to attend to it. Almost immediately *PRIMROSE* sighted two more on the port bow of the convoy and was also detailed to deal with them. They had the sauce to make off on the surface, hotly pursued by 4-inch shells, but as it would soon be dark, we did not fall for that one and returned to our station. Since the enemy persisted in making his attacks from the port bow of the convoy, we assumed he wished to keep it, and us, between him and the sun. You will recollect that our mean course was easterly.



HMS Dianthus

DIANTHUS reported at 2146 she had sighted two more submarines and a little help would not be amiss. *CHILLIWACK*, having the most depth charges left, was sent to her aid. Then a slight lull ensued and most of the "Primroses" fell asleep where they were, since we had been stood down at action stations, whilst I had a talk with the Captain of the Greek ship (who had decided to make his quarters in the Ward-room bath) about the possibility of going back for his ship, to give it a tow. Then the Coxswain and I toured the ship to see who was where; practically every bunk, bed and hammock was occupied by the survivors, all of whom seemed most impressed by the fact that none of us seemed to need any sleep: and many of whom, were totally unaware they owed their lives to the unremitting toil and determination of the Buffer, using oxygen bottles properly belonging to the fire-fighting breathing apparatus, and his powerful arms, to make them live.

Strangely, you may think, the whole ship's company was very cheerful and the ship had never been happier. Of course, everyone knew his job and relatively few orders had to be given, because everything worked on the basis of quiet harmony, understanding and willing co-operation. I have not mentioned all the false alarms - even a seagull with his head in the water and his arse in the air could be mistaken for a periscope - but there were many of those, each one starting with the raucous ringing of the alarm bells, followed by a few brief moments of running feet clattering on ladders, the dull thuds of water-tight doors closing, the rattle of ammunition hoists being cleared away, the clang of a breech block, the noise of buzzers as positions

reported close up - and then the silent tension of readiness, with here and there a smile, and everywhere calm, watchful eyes in tired, strained faces. It is all called "a high state of morale"; those who shared in it will never forget it and think with nostalgia of the days when all were of one company.

That state of morale, which rapidly made me forget the physical and mental effects of my stupidity (not that I had much time to dwell upon either), had a very marked effect upon the survivors who paid us many compliments, because for the first time many of them saw what the Navy was doing in its endeavour to protect them, even if outwardly it did not appear to be all that successful. For me, it underlined how important it is that the Royal Navy and the Merchant Navy should each know all about the affairs and problems of the other. I fear that is another lesson a new generation has to learn all over again, unless someone has the wit to plan it now.

The day was not yet over. At 2301 *DIANTHUS* radioed she was attacking another submarine 1,000 yards away. *CHILLIWACK* joined to assist, but the U-boat escaped and contact was lost. *DIANTHUS* ordered *CHILLIWACK* to return to the convoy, while she remained to snoop around a little longer in case the German decided to come up for air. Eventually giving it up, the ship set course to rejoin the convoy, only to come upon *U.379* on the surface at 2358: she succeeded in ramming the U-boat four times, finally despatching it with depth charges after a hot 15 minutes.

Corvettes were not good vessels for ramming, although we all liked the idea. Since *DIANTHUS* was in a sinking condition and already had over 200 survivors, including some Germans from *U.210*, she was only able to take aboard five of *U.379*'s survivors, generously giving the rest in the water all the ship's carley floats and some food. She then left them to get on with it and made off at two knots.

Only superhuman exertions saved the ship from foundering as the lower forrard messdeck, cable locker and forrard fuel tank were flooded. By carrying everything aft, including cable and anything else moveable, the ship's company managed to get the bows clear of the water by daylight. What that night was like only those present can know. There were nearly 300 men aboard, including some Greek survivors who offered to cut the German prisoners' throats, which they insisted would lighten the ship when the bodies were thrown overboard afterwards. *DIANTHUS*' Commanding Officer said the best moment of the day was when he introduced the Captain of *U.379* to the senior officer of *U.210*.



The damage sustained by *Dianthus* in the ramming of *U.379*

9th August 1942 About 0350 *BATTLEFORD* started her own fight and once again the rest joined in with starshell, Snowflake and the usual noise. Shortly afterwards *BROKE* reported D/F bearings of two U-boats ahead and Admiralty added to the fun by telling us of a few more. The pack was chattering as it collected again. *DIANTHUS* rejoined after daylight to a rousing welcome from both convoy and escort, to be safely esconced right in the middle of the convoy (not, mark you, that anywhere was particularly safe), and able to make 10 knots if required. Some rough weather might have saved some merchant ships, but it would have done *DIANTHUS* no good.

Later that morning the immense destroyer *BLYSKAWICA* joined, belting hotfoot through the convoy at over 30 knots, to investigate her own private D/F bearing. For the rest of the time she had a roving commission and made a lot of noise about it, but her speed and armament, plus her superb crew, must have turned the odds somewhat in our favour. No German wanted to find himself in the hands of the Poles. A surfaced U-boat seeing that ship coming dived deep very quickly indeed, and a deep-dived U-boat was a harmless one.

A siesta in the afternoon was spoilt by *ORILLIA* and *NASTURTIUM* contacting a submarine at periscope depth, sneaking up on the starboard beam of the convoy, but both had to give up after half an hour of plastering because depth charges were getting short, as was our fuel. After that, the rest of the day passed peacefully, but by that time no one could settle down, so we ate wads, drank a brew or two, and dozed while we waited for it to begin again.

10th August 1942 We were at action stations again by 0030 on the strength of two radar echoes ahead, as usual again to port. At 0034 torpedoes were heard coining our way. They passed close by down the starboard side and we waited for a bang astern. They hit nothing, but we found the firer and gave him a good belting with depth charges until the convoy was too close for safety. Next morning *BROKE* informed us she had also had a similar experience but had not found anything to belt.

By now all in *PRIMROSE* had a distinct dislike for the port bow position, but we were shortly to exchange it for an even nastier one. Dawn found us ordered to sweep 20 miles astern of the convoy to deter shadowers detected by D/F in *BROKE*. I personally felt that of all places in the Atlantic that was the last place to be, because it was there the pack would reform after its last night's abortive effort. But just the same, off we went, and by 0400 were well on our way, feeling extremely lonely and very exposed. The Coxswain, as he often did, came up to keep me company on the bridge accompanied by his own special brew of very fortifying "kai" (cocoa to you).

About 0630, just after the Bosun's Mate had brought me some tea, the masthead look-out reported a merchant ship on the horizon ahead. I peered through my glasses and saw what looked like the most enormous submarine ever built equipped with a gun appropriate to its size! No wonder the man up the "stick" thought he had seen a merchant ship! I pressed the alarm bells, when the CO arrived, took the shortest route to the gun platform by jumping off the front of the bridge and, with the aid of a couple of hands, got that gun going quicker than it had ever been roused out before. A round alongside the conning tower convinced the Germans that the decent thing to do was to dive, and when we arrived at the diving position it was treated to a couple of charges to discourage any ideas it might have had of coning up for a shoot out.

Just as we were replenishing the upper deck stowage with ammunition, a yelp from the pom-pom gun's crew aft reported an even bigger and better submarine. Round went the ship. Bang went the gun. Down went the U-boat. Another yell from the masthead produced a third. We'd found the pack! Number three did not seem to have spotted us because he was obviously looking towards the way the convoy had gone and he was liberally plastered for his pains. The last shell landed smack on the place where his periscope was disappearing and I have always hoped he had to find his way back to Germany (if ever he did) without it. *CHILLIWACK* had been ordered to our aid and when she turned up we had a nice little hunt together, working the submarine over until 1023, when *BROKE* came up on the squawk-box to call us back because another four merchant ships had been sunk. There were a few comments about "all would now be well"!



A sinister shape on the horizon, half a point to port.

On the way back an abandoned merchant ship left over from *BROKE*'s forenoon party was sighted ahead, so we altered course to investigate as some lurking U-boat put a torpedo into it and sank it. *CHILLIWACK* gained a contact and dropped the last of her depth charges. We went in and found nothing. So we both then made off to rejoin the convoy and my CO exercised the privilege of rank by leaving me on the bridge while he nipped off for a nap. Just after he had got to "fifty fathoms down" a thunderous explosion blew the ship up in the air by the stern! Everything stood on its head! The survivors climbed into the boats and rafts ready to take to the sea again; my CO belted on to the bridge and blasted me for dropping depth charges without his permission (quite forgetting I did in fact have his permission to do so); steam and the Chief Stoker appeared from the boiler room to announce that every gauge glass was busted; the Chief Engineer ("Pluto" - so nicknamed because he always wore a hat with long ear flaps) arrived to say everything in his part of the world was groaning and squeaking; the steward arrived to report that every piece of glass in the officers quarters was shattered (the ship's company had long since been living out of empty bean cans) —and in that he included such vital things as bottles of gin and other succulent foods. We unbunged our ears, found we were still afloat, and still steaming at our best speed. Over the ship spread one big grin. This is refit stuff, said that grin! I have no idea what caused the bang, but I suspect it was either a near miss from a torpedo going off in our wake or, more likely, the abandoned merchant ship we had seen sunk, blowing up underneath us as ammunition in her hold exploded. We were not really fussy at the time.

We rejoined the convoy at 1300. The fuel situation was now a critical factor in whether or not we could fend off another attack. We had a few depth charges left for a final fling and not much fling left in ourselves. We received the glad news that air cover was laid on for the next day and that HM Ships *SKATE*, *SALADIN*, *SHIKARI* and *SABRE* had been sailed from Londonderry in support, ships famous for the fact that in rough weather only their funnels were clear of the water. Around midday air cover in the shape of a Catalina flying boat arrived and from then on was constant, although we did not see much of it. At about 1800 *HMS SENNEN* also turned up out of the blue to take off some of our Greek shipmates to go back and look for their ship in case it was still afloat. They volunteered to a man, but a towing party of only eight could be transferred by whaler because of the heavy sea running; the remainder of the Greek crew raised hell because they could not go as well, except for the Captain who accepted the vicissitudes of life and remained in the bath. No one envied them their job and each of the eight had to jump for it. The seamanship of the whaler's crew was superb and not an oar was broken. They were all brave men in that boat.

Late that night one further attack was driven off at 2300. It was not pressed home, but it was the end of our depth charges.

11th August 1942 After an uneasy night in a sloppy sea, which bounced us around, dawn broke cold, windy and grey, and it was wet on deck. Life below was uncomfortable because of the crowd of survivors, and it must have been far worse in the other ships which had many more. Gradually it began to dawn on us that perhaps the worst was over, although none could really relax; we just hung around feeling drained, tired and apprehensive - waiting with nothing to do in such circumstances really lets the reaction set in, especially if you happen to be feeling a little sea-sick. I applied the usual First Lieutenant's remedy and set everyone to work to tidy up the ship, which the Chief Stoker endeavoured to counter by emerging to say fresh water would have to be rationed as one of his evaporators (a piece of diabolical machinery which turned sea water into fresh water) was in need of a clean!

At 2000 the support force from Londonderry arrived in its usual cloud of spray and we settled down as the weather eased to wait for another attack. It did not come, because it was all over, although we did not know it.

12th August 1942 At 1000 five rusty, dirty, sea-worn corvettes escorting a sixth, with its grinning bows high out of the water, were despatched to proceed to harbour - and the fleshpots! There the story ends. The ship got its refit, my CO got a brand new frigate and I got accelerated promotion to Lieutenant; we all got drunk after we arrived in Londonderry except the Coxswain, who said he did not approve of it. (It wasn't that he did not drink: it was simply that he never got drunk, no matter how much he drank!)

JUST ONE CONVOY.... Sir Winston Churchill in his "Second World War" (volume IV, page 110) writes, "The main battle was by now once more joined along the great convoy routes of the North Atlantic. The U-boats had already learned to respect the power of the air, and in their new assault they worked almost entirely in the central section, beyond reach of aircraft based on Iceland and Newfoundland. Two convoys were severely mauled in August, one of them losing eleven ships. . . ."



*There are no flowers on a sailors grave
No lilies on an ocean wave
The only tribute is the seagulls sweep
And the tear drop on a loved ones cheek
We shall remember them*

So ends Commander Ralph Sheffield's account of convoy SC94. He wrote it some 35 years after the event without the help of such modern research aids and memory joggers as the internet and the world wide web.

The original document, as submitted by Cdr David Gibbons, was seventeen pages of typed text and in a quest for some pictures with which to illustrate the piece my first port of call was Google images. No picture of *HMS Primrose* but one of Cdr Sheffield as CO of HMS Wildfire (*Cachalot 34*)

www.hmswildfire.org.uk/64-89/cos.htm .

No pictures either on the usual RN websites but when I tried the Gallery on the Ships Nostalgia site there was just the one photo. www.shipsnostalgia.com/gallery . It had been posted by a John Firmin whose father had actually sailed on the *Primrose*. When I contacted John for his permission to reproduce the picture it turned out that John, who came ashore after gaining his Second Mate's with BP, had several more shots taken by his father on board *Primrose*, including some of the Officers and POs mentioned in the account. That it was forbidden to take such photos during the war accounts for the scarcity of them and John Snr probably got away with it due to a more relaxed regime on the Flower Class Corvette when compared to the more senior vessels. Anyway, it would seem that John Snr served on *Primrose* during that trip and certainly on the one previous to it.

My search for further images led me to a site detailing the particulars of all the merchant vessels in the convoy and their fate, www.warsailors.com/convoys/sc94.html and then on to a picture of the Commodore's vessel, the *Trehata*, one of my old company's ships. www.uboot.net/allies/merchants/2014.html She was not on her maiden voyage but had been built as the *Nohata* in 1927 and renamed in 1936. She was on a voyage from Hampton Roads for Manchester with 3000 tons of steel, 1000 tons of tinned goods, 1000 tons of lard, 1000 tons of cheese and 1000 tons of manufactured goods, and had on board a crew of 41 and 8 gunners, as well as the Commodore and 6 naval staff . 31 died, including the Master, John Lawrie, DSO with bar, DSC, and the convoy commodore, Vice-Admiral D.F. Moir, DSO RN, and his six staff members. 21 crew members and four gunners were picked up by the Norwegian *Inger Lise*.

While trawling through the U boat pages I came upon the report of the interrogation of the survivors of U 379. (Again, contrary to Ralph's recollections, there were no Officers among the 5 survivors.) If your idea of a U boat commander is that of a steely eyed ace then be prepared to be amazed at the description of Kapitanleutnant Paul-Hugo Kettner, "a lazy, inefficient martinet". www.ubootarchive.net/U-379INT.htm

When I looked up *ORP BLYSKAWICA*, pictured here, there were even more surprises. One of the fastest WW2 destroyers, she was built at the E.Cowes yard of J.Samuel White in 1935-37. She happened to be back there for an emergency refit in May '42 when the town was attacked by 160 German low-level



bombers. She was instrumental in the defence of the town, her guns forcing the bombers to maintain a safer (for them) height. She also laid a smokescreen but even so there were over 70 killed and White's yard was badly damaged. (After extensive repairs the first vessel to be built after the raid was *HMS Cavalier*.) In recognition of the crew's courage on that night an area in West Cowes outside the Painters Arms was, in 2004, renamed *Francki Place*, after the CO at the time. *BLYSKAWICA* went on to earn an impressive war-time record and is now a museum ship at Gdynia. The local council intend to receive her back in Cowes in May 2012 to mark the 70th anniversary of the raid and celebrate the vessels 75th birthday.

www.iwight.com/home/news/bl2.asp



Ralph Sheffield, seen here in another picture from John Firmin, went on to see service as First Lieutenant of HM Corvette *Amarathus* and also HMS *Kildwick* (a KIL Class frigate). He was Commanding Officer of HMS *Lady Elsa* (A/S Admiralty Trawler). After the war he became a member of the RNV(S)R and was promoted Lieutenant Commander in 1960. He was Executive Officer of HMS *Wildfire* in 1973 and on promotion to Commander in 1974 he succeeded to Command. He was awarded the OBE (Military) in 1977 in recognition of his service to the RNR and HMS *Wildfire* in

particular. After retiring from his duties as the Secretary of Hambros Bank he spent his time variously as a Director of the White Ensign Association and as a Governor of the Royal Naval Girls School. He went aloft sometime in the '80s.

Dibden Bay deadlock - a way ahead?

Recently, when members of parliament asked for more information on the use of inland waterways and coastal shipping, the chairman of the industry lobby group "Freight by Water" responded.

"We need to raise the profile of the water options for freight in this country- the coast, rivers and inland waterways such as the canals. We are under- using them and they are available at little extra cost. For example you can build a new motorway at millions of pounds per mile, whereas we have a coastal motorway that is there now. We have over 100 ports, so let's use them to greater effect. We need to get more container journeys off the road and on to water, so we anticipate growing coastal distribution of containers ".

Speaking at a recent "Freight by Water" seminar, the UK shipping minister gave an assurance that the government continues to be committed to *boosting* British coastal and inland waterways as part of a strategy to cut carbon emissions from transport and he sought more research into alternatives to road transport. Indeed, the minister stated categorically "We would like to see more freight transferred to water" Despite this, the use of waterborne transport is decreasing, hence the concerns of the lobby group.

Throughout mainland European ports the use of barges to transport containers from the ship' side to inland destinations is commonplace but, in the United Kingdom, there is considerable resistance to this and although it is deemed to be cheaper and faster to move the container by road transport the cost estimate ignores the very significant costs of wear and tear on the roads and the cost of delays (and inconvenience) caused to other road users. Motorists using the M3, M25 or A34 - to mention but a few - will be aware of the huge number of lorries transporting a single container from the discharge port to its inland destination.

During the "Dibden Bay" controversy much was made of the impact that such a development would have on local traffic conditions with terrifying forecasts of the number of container lorries per hour adding to atmospheric pollution and to the already, at times, chaotic road conditions in the approaches to the New Forest and beyond. Various proposals to overcome these real problems were tabled; few were realistic, all were extremely costly and none satisfied those who were opposed to the extension of Southampton's container handling facilities to a new port on the Waterside. Shortly afterwards, a Government backed decision to develop a new facility on the lower Thames - the " London Gateway" project on the site of the redundant Shellhaven refinery was deemed to be more than capable of meeting the *national* need for increased container handling facilities and so, for the moment, Dibden Bay has been put on the "back burner".

Container carriers, like passenger carrying ships, will continue to grow in size and undoubtedly this will result in even deeper draughts when fully laden. The cost of the *maintenance* dredging need to permit the 24/7 operation of these huge ships will be horrific and for a port like Southampton with a lengthy waterway approach (and already unable to offer deep draught navigation at all states of the tide) this will be especially so.

An aerial view of the Port of Southampton shows, very clearly, that IF the port is to expand then the lost logical site for any such worthwhile expansion is Dibden Bay. Indeed, over many years millions of cubic metres of the "spoil" accumulated during the dredging of the Solent and approaches have been deliberately deposited there to build up a foundation for the proposed docks development. Understandably, Nature has intervened and the area is now the natural habitat for many species of birds and animals and there are some who fear that any disruption to their environment would result in, at worst, their demise or, at best their abandonment of the local area. Others are more realistic and believe that the present inhabitants will simply move a few miles up the road and continue to enjoy life as hitherto.

Undoubtedly, the traffic problem presents the greatest challenge and so, IF the Port of Southampton is to enjoy the expansion so essential to the local economy then, almost certainly, a more innovative approach is needed.

It is axiomatic that IF the traffic congestion and pollution problem can be overcome or reduced substantially then much of the opposition to the development of Dibden Bay will subside so, how might this be achieved? The only way is to abolish the *need for vehicular traffic* by replacing it with *seaborne traffic*.

What if many of the containers presently being sent by road from the container port were to be loaded on to barges, sent the short distance from there to Dibden Bay, and re-loaded on to smaller "short sea" vessels for delivery to many of the small ports around the United Kingdom (and mainland Europe) capable of handling such craft ?

Many of these small ports would enjoy a rejuvenation of immense value to them and their environment, the Waterside would no longer be subject to the threat of increased traffic congestion and pollution, and coupled with the pending increased use of rail transport, motorways throughout the country would see a welcome reduction in wear and tear and a much improved traffic flow. The shallow(er) draught vessels would obviate the need for expensive initial and maintenance dredging and the local economy would benefit. It has even been suggested that empty or light boxes might cross the short stretch of water suspended from a continuous overhead wire gantry for almost direct delivery to the smaller ships. The scope for innovation is immense.

Today's environmental considerations have dictated slower steaming speeds and imposed changes in the "just in time" delivery philosophy that has governed container shipping operations for so many years. Now is the time to act.



Rope Ends



Captains, past, present and future, in attendance at the presentation of the Bursary Certificate to Mike Smith, above left, on 2nd June:

D. Stocks, I. Salter, B. O'Connor, L. Morris, R. Kelso, I. Thomson, G. Cartwright (Capt), M. Smith, P. Marriott, S. Greenfield (Carnival Cruises), D. Gates, G. Angas, P. Leece, T. Clark.

A Plea from Cachalot Stuart Withington

It's eight years since I took on the gruelling challenge on behalf of the British Legion by cycling 300 miles from London to Paris in just four days. Despite my now aching stiffening joints and wrinkling skin I have taken on the challenge a second time.

Like last time I will be one of hundreds cycling between the two capitals. The "Pedal to Paris" ride begins at London's Greenwich Park on Thursday 2 September and ends at the Arc De Triumph on Sunday 5 September.

The ride is in aid of this year's British Legion fund raising campaign. The money raised will help the Armed Forces' Afghan generation of brave young men and women and their families

These young men and women are there to protect us when we need it. The Legion will always be there to protect them and their families should they ever need us.

A donation can be made with cash or by a cheque made out to the British Legion and sent to my home address.

Alternatively, you can donate through my web page. This way is simple, quick and secure. It is the most efficient way to give. If you are a UK taxpayer and give Gift Aid consent, the charity will receive an extra 28% at no cost to you.

My web site page is at: www.bmycharity.com/stuartwithington

I promise to donate one pound for every pound that you put into my fund pot.

Many thanks for your support. Stuart.

11 Bere Close
Winchester
SO22 5HY

Southampton Royal Naval Officers Association

Formed in 1965, following a defence funding review, the SRNOA is an association of retired and serving officers of the Royal Navy, the Royal Marines and their reserves. Associate membership is open to officers of the other services including the Merchant Navy.

Six lecture meetings are held during the winter months; Sept ~ Nov and Feb ~ April with an AGM in May.

Past lectures have included:

The search for HMS /M X5 (ww11)
E.U. Operation Bugle in Darfur
All four engines have failed!
Buccaneer – last all British bomber

Carl Spencer – Diver
Cdr Martyn Skeer RN
B.A. Capt Eric Moody
Air Cdre Pitchfork

Lecture programme for the remainder of this year (Mondays 1900 for 1930):

13/9/10 Swords for Officers of the Royal Navy
4/10/10 In the Wake of William Bligh
1/11/10 Future Threats and Risks

Capt John McGrath RN (retired)
Jasper Shackleton
Rear Admiral (retired) Chris Perry

These are held in Thunder Squadron, Capella House, Cook Street (St.Marys) Southampton, with use of the wardroom before and after.

An annual dinner and Trafalgar Night are held at a venue in Southampton plus a social evening in December.

Subscriptions are currently £10 per year payable in April.

New members are sought, contact Lt Cdr G A Draysey Rd, Chairman, through the Club.

A Message from the Southampton Shipping Golfing Society

Dear Captain Cartwright and members of Southampton Master Mariners Club,

On behalf of Southampton Shipping Golfing Society may we sincerely thank you for presenting us with your golf cup, which you have refurbished and renamed the "Southampton Master Mariners Cup". The Cup will be presented to the winner of our new scratch KO competition introduced this year at our annual supper in November. Our President, David d'Arcy Hughes, together with myself and our Vice President Roger Treherne enjoyed your hospitality and the opportunity to meet members of your organisation. We are very proud of our roots and the strong links we have to the maritime Industry of Southampton and although our membership comes from a wider area these days, we still maintain many of the traditions introduced by our founder's way back in 1921.

We share several members with your organisations and are very keen to improve the links between SSGS and the Master Mariners, we currently have a membership close to 150, but would be delighted to hear from any member who may be interested to know more or consider joining us.

We have recently launched our own web site which I would hope you will find of interest, for which the address is www.sotonshippinggolf.com

On our home page you will find details of how we nearly lost all our trophies during world war two; we will make sure we look after this new one. The web site also has links to various officers of SSGS, should you wish to know more.

Many of our trophies were presented by the major shipping lines using the Port of Southampton during the last 90 years with the oldest the White Star Cup dating back to 1921, The Castle Cup, Salvage Association Cup and Westminster Bowl are just a few of the 40 plus trophies we have. Among the winners over the years are many Master Mariners including the late Richard Bayley, a past Captain of the Southampton Master Mariners and past President of the SSGS, he will be sadly missed at our past President lunch on September 13th.

As we celebrate 70 years since the battle of Britain we are proud to be able to include among our winners in 1935, R. J. Mitchell, the designer of the Spitfire.

Next year we celebrate our 90th anniversary, during which we will be celebrating with several special events, we will also be trying to promote and enhance our links with the maritime Industry.

Thank you once again for presenting us with you Cup and particular thanks to George Angas for making this happen.

I hope we get to welcome some of you to one of our meeting in the near future.

David Corbett
Chairman SSGS

Our thanks to Captain Malcolm Parrott, Master, The Honorable Company of Master Mariners, for his response to our Hon Archivist, Hamish Robert's plea in the last edition for information on some of our own Past Captains.

New Member

J.D. Hamilton.

John Hamilton is the Marine Superintendent at the BP Oil Terminal at Hamble and joins us to extend his social and professional network in the maritime industry.



President of the SSGS, David d'Arcy Hughes, receives the cup from Gerry Cartwright

The Club room is currently open three days a week, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, 1130 - 1500. Liz will be only too happy to serve you a drink and she can take your orders for meals, sandwiches and snacks.

Suggestions for events, for improvements, offers of help, articles and anecdotes for inclusion in this newsletter will all be received with pleasure. We are even prepared to receive complaints if they are constructive.

The Club's address is:

**The Southampton Master
Mariners' Club,
(The CACHALOTS)
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Terrace,
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Dates for your Diary

- | | | | | |
|-----|------|----|--|------------------------|
| Sat | Sept | 4 | Curry Lunch | Gurkha Kitchen |
| Sun | Sept | 5 | MNA Memorial Service | Holyrood |
| Tue | Sept | 7 | Coach trip to Windsor Castle & Savill Garden | |
| Fri | Sept | 17 | Club Supper, Mary Rose Club room | |
| Sat | Oct | 9 | Autumn Dinner Dance | RAF Yacht Club, Hamble |
| Sat | Oct | 16 | Curry Lunch | Tba |
| Fri | Nov | 5 | Harpooners' Dinner | Club room |
| Wed | Nov | 10 | Sea Pie tickets on Sale | |
| Sat | Dec | 4 | Christmas Lunch | King's Court |
| Sat | Dec | 11 | Christmas Dinner, | King's Court |

**Cut-off date for the next edition:
12th November**

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|----------|-----------------------------|
| 250 Club | |
| June | S.R. Dyer G. Lang |
| July | R. Plumley A. Tinsley |
| August | M. D. A. Lee H. F. Forse |