

*H.M.S. Phoebe  
Association*



*Newsletter*

*April 2003*

At the moment things are looking up for the reunion in May. It has been a worrying time for a while, getting that e mail from the Town Hall Leisure office telling me the Commemorative seats were now £870 each, was quite a blow, it looked like our little ceremony was knocked on the head. Mike Fox has been working on it; phoning and speaking to council officers, but not getting far, no one seemed to want to help. Mike phoned me to say he had an appointment with the Assistant Leisure Officer. I said I would be there as well, he told me to phone Emily Cross and ask her if she would give us her backing. Some of you who have attended the T.S. Phoebe venues will have met Emily, and know how demanding she can be. I did phone her, and straight away she said Lil and I could stay at her house overnight, just in case the meeting took longer than expected, she was sorry but she could not go to the meeting as she had meetings already booked for that day but she said if anything went wrong we were to phone her. The meeting was for 11 am, we met Mike at the Town Hall, and went in to the meeting, no matter how much we tried, they would not come down on the price, the assistant Marc even went to see the director, but he too was adamant. Mike immediately phoned Emily at her meeting, she almost blew her top when told the price was still £870 for each seat. From then on things really got moving. We left the office then, and went to the Town Hall's 101 club situated on the 4th floor, we met up with the Steward to organise the hire of the club and bar for a couple of hours after the dedication, we chose this place as it is only a few minutes walk from where we will be in the Upper Gardens. Brian, the Steward, told us the price and I accepted, a sponsor had already been found to cover the cost, all we shall have to pay for from our funds is for the light refreshments we want laid on, we do not know how much that is yet until we know the numbers attending. Lil and I met up with Emily when we got to her house, she would not tell us how she got on until we were sitting down with a cup of tea. She said that she dropped what she was doing at her meeting and phoned around to various offices getting backing from some, and threatening others until she got her way. She phoned the Mayor first and got his backing, also getting him to phone and demand a cut in the price, likewise the Deputy Mayor, she got no response from one guy until she said she would take it to the press and get his non-cooperation printed in the local paper. She would too, and they knew it, he climbed down and gave in to Emily, we now have written statements to say that the seats will cost us this years price for refurbished seats, and that is £190 each, this will include ten years maintenance, and servicing. It also includes the re-siting of two seats to make room for our two, they will be placed opposite the memorial stone we are laying, they will also bed the Stone free, plus they will store the stone until just before we want it erected, all this Emily won for us, she worked tirelessly, even leaving her meeting to do so. For this we have invited her to be our guest on the Saturday evening for dinner, and after. We reckoned that the prices we were given was before VAT was added, that would mean each seat would have cost us £1000 each.

The Mayor, and Deputy Mayor could not come to the dinner, but have expressed their wish to be invited to the dedication, this has been done to all who have helped, the only thing to go wrong there, was my sending invitation cards with RSVP on them, but no address of where to reply to. A phone call to each got a resounding laugh.

The Chaplain to the T.S. Phoebe has volunteered his services, and thanks to Emily, the local paper will be carrying the story and pictures of the dedication, the paper does not usually cover weekend events, but they do now? Three local RNA Branches, and the three local R.B.L. Branches have been invited to attend with their Standards. I am not expecting a massive turn out, but I would like to see others there, especially the Standards.

The dedication will take place in the Upper Gardens behind the War Memorial at 1030 am, this is only a stone's throw from the Town Hall, there is parking in the road, also in the Town Hall car parks, if I can get permission.

I applied to the Heritage fund 'Awards for All' and after a couple of hiccups had the application accepted. I expect some of you are wondering what the award is for, it is to help with traveling and hotel expenses for the senior citizen shipmates attending the reunion, the award is not anything to do with charity, but to help organisations such as ours in bringing people together. I have not had any answer from the fund yet, and do not expect an answer until about the end of March, our application was late due to the hiccups, but it is before the Board now, all we can do is wait and see. (Application turned down, see page 4)

The T.S. Phoebe meet on a Friday night for training etc, we have been invited to attend, if there is

enough response, Mike will arrange for you to be picked up at the hotel around 1930 and transported to the H.Q., and returned to the hotel later, there is a nice cosy wardroom at the H.Q. with a bar, drinks are well below pub prices, Pusser's Rum too, the bar opens when training has finished at 2100. The H.Q. was to be rebuilt, but that has now been squashed, instead a new, and substantially bigger, H.Q. is to be built on land that has been leased near Kings Park, work on the plans etc has already been done, all that is needed now is the money to build it, set at approximately. £500,000. That will mean quite a few raffles? I think. Mike Fox, their Chairman, has 'irons in the fire' already, but it's a heck of a lot of money to find.

**I am sorry to report Shipmate Mike Legg  
crossed the Bar on 13th Feb. 2003.  
(See Page 5)**

S/m Bill Gibson had a heavy fall tripping up on a raised pavement; he suffered two badly bruised hands, sore ribs and a badly bruised knee. Hopefully he is on the mend. (Sue the council; they reckon it costs less to pay for accidents than to mend the roads and pavements).

If you remember in the last newsletter I told you about Doris Vye and her 91st birthday, Lil and I drove into London to see her, and take her some flowers. I must say she looks a sprightly 91. She was so pleased to see us, but even more so over the cards she got from shipmates, one all the way from America. I thank you very much for your efforts shipmates; it was lovely to see the smile on her face.

I was informed that a visitor to the Phoebe War Grave in Pointe Noire found the Memorial in a bad state, but the War Graves Commission has now taken that on board, and a new maintenance contract has been awarded. The letter states that the Memorial will not be forgotten.

Our apologies to S/m George Baines, we did not know he was so ill, or that he was nearly Ninety, when is that day George?

The war in Iraq is on our minds at the moment, it does not appear to be as easy to conquer as first thought, and again we see our troops being killed by friendly fire, our condolences go out to all the families of those killed in action, or otherwise. My nephew is serving out there on H.M.S. York; Lil is rather concerned about that.

I am afraid I did not agree with the Sun newspaper scattering white leathers on a visiting French warship. It is not the crew's fault they are not out there, they are doing the same as we did during our service. "Obeying orders" How many times have we been in places where we wanted to get 'stuck in' but ordered not to.

Here is a short extract from a sailor's tale, sent to me while I was doing the H.M.S. Sheffield's newsletter, which, thank God, I no longer do.

Shortly after the war was declared, my ship, H.M.S. Intrepid, sailed in to Harwich to take on fuel. The RAF had laid on a 'Fly Past' to teach the Navy aircraft recognition. Apparently they were fed up with being fired upon by our own side. As far as I can recall, it was stated their losses had been: 8 shot down by the French, 10 by the Army, 19 by the Navy, but only 12 by the Germans. We all crowded up on the forecastle, thinking this was a better way to actually see the planes close to. Our Gunners Mate called out what the planes were as they came into view and flew past, "This is a Spitfire" he said, as a graceful shape did a Victory Roll, then came a Hurricane, followed by a Whitley, then a Defiant and a Wellington, not far behind came an Anson and a Hampden. As they flew away, the GM said "Now here comes one of the new Lockheed Hudson's from the USA". We looked up to see sleek twin engine bomber diving down, then suddenly pulling up into a climb as canon shells and tracer were fired at our new "chum". We turned to see the Polish destroyer "Grom" entering harbour, her AA guns blazing at the Hudson as it climbed. To the "Grom" all aircraft were enemy; she always 'fired first and asked questions later'. The "Grom" was sunk by dive-bombers in a Norwegian Fiord just a short time later. The ship I was on then, "H.M.S. Bedouin" was there at the time, and although we sent in boats there were not many survivors to pick up.

I am sorry to remind shipmates that the subscription you pay is the lifeline of the Association, without topping up the funds each year we would not have enough in the fund to pay our way. I am no different to anyone else, I also forget things, that's why I rely on Lil so much, she sees to everything regarding money. Subscriptions (£5) have stayed the same since they were first introduced in September 1996, but everything else has increased in price.

I realise not everyone has a Lil to remind them of things that are due, that is why a reminder is always published in the August newsletter. Two or three shipmates have to be reminded 3 or 4 months later, that is not a worry, but at the moment 25 Members have still not paid their subs, that is £100 at least, and that is a worry.

We do not mean to cause offence, and I am sorry if you find a subscription reminder attached to this Newsletter.

But your subscriptions for 2002/2003 are overdue.

Mr Pavely

**RE: APPLICATION TO THE AWARDS FOR ALL PROGRAMME**

Thank you for your application to the Awards for All scheme. On behalf of the Joint Regional Committee, I am sorry to have to inform you that you have been unsuccessful in obtaining an award from Awards for All. The role of the committee is to decide between the many competing applications which we receive, and the committee's decision is final. Your application was unsuccessful because: There is currently a high demand for funding under the Awards for All scheme and less than half of the applications received could be funded on this occasion. The Committee must prioritise applications that it feels best meet the aims of the programme, as set out on page 10 of the application pack, and the Regional Focus. Whilst appreciating the value of your project, the Committee felt that it had received applications which more closely met these aims, and was unable to make an award to your organisation within the limited funds available.

I realise that this decision will be disappointing but we hope, as a result of providing information about the reason(s) for rejection, your organisation will feel better equipped to apply to us in the Future.

Sorry shipmates, it was worth a try, perhaps if we all emigrate to France and come back seeking asylum we will get our dues,

Shipmate Abe Carolan informs me that I have published his telephone number wrongly in the Members List; it should read:-\*\*\*\*\* \*\*\*\*\* . Would you rectify that in your list please.

Police in Radnor. Pennsylvania, interrogated a suspect by placing a colander on his head and connecting it with wires to a photocopier. The message "**He's Lying**" was placed in the copier, and the police pressed the copy button each time they thought he was not telling the truth. Believing the "lie detector" was working, the suspect confessed....

**MICHAEL JOHN LEGG**  
**Fleet Chief, Royal Navy. Retired.**

Born 30th April, 1942, Henfield, Sussex. Died aged 61, 13th February 2003, of cancer.

**Chief Operations, Sonar Control - H.M.S. Phoebe**  
**6th September 1976 to 22<sup>nd</sup> June 1979**

Many old friends of Mike Legg in the H.M.S. Phoebe Association will no doubt be surprised to read this dit. And many of you know that my life has been closely entwined with Mike's - or Mick as he was known to many people.

It started on 11<sup>th</sup> June, 1957 when at the tender age of 15 we said goodbye to both our Mums at Waterloo Station bound for Portsmouth and the "Andrew". We headed off for a minimum 12 years Royal Navy service. Mike and I discussed this last year and he remembered it as if it was almost yesterday.

On arrival at Portsmouth, we went across the harbour and saw H.M.S. Vanguard the battleship, two aircraft carriers and several cruisers, plus frigates - an amazing sight to greet us.

H.M.S. St Vincent - Naval Juniors Training School. The first month was an absolute shock: learning how to keep ourselves, the beds, walls and floors all clean, and sew with needle/thread, etc. After the initial 12 months "boys" training we both decided on the specialist anti-submarine warfare role. We "Passed Out" from St Vincent on 26<sup>th</sup> June 1958 and went to H.M.S. Osprey -ASDIC Training School, Portland until October 1958. From then on it was as though there was some unseen hand to ensure we either worked alongside on the same ship (there were several) or in the same squadron together. We travelled the world; working in Mediterranean, Atlantic, Persian Gulf, Indian Ocean and Far East. Mostly I went away first, but then he followed me shortly after. This went on for many years. Even when I went to work on the building and fitting out of the latest Leander frigate H.M.S. Phoebe in Alexander Stephen's Yard, Glasgow, during 1965, within a few months there was Mike stationed in the next shipyard doing the same work for H.M.S. Fife, a new cruiser!

Mike eventually joined H.M.S. Phoebe commissioning her on 6<sup>th</sup> September 1976 as the Buffer and Chief Operations Sonar Control. What laughs we had together when he rang to tell me. He stayed until the end of this commission, 22<sup>nd</sup> June 1979. Afterwards, he told me that it was probably the happiest ship he had ever had the privilege of serving on "It just had this aura about it somehow" he said. I'm sure you can imagine there were many times during those intervening years of great stress - cold war was on and we were operating as on the front line against Soviet sub fleet - and yet we had fantastic fun and games too.

As most of us know, Mike displayed incredible courage and bravery. During the Falklands war he was on Atlantic Conveyor. The ship was sunk by Argentine aircraft using Exocet missiles on 25<sup>th</sup> May, 1982. Mike was one of the last to leave the burning and sinking ship. Whilst in the water he managed to help the Captain swim towards a life raft. Mike was awarded the M.B.E. for his actions by H.M.. The Queen at Buckingham Palace on 11<sup>th</sup> October 1982 His courage also shone through during the later years too. There were other very difficult times for him: like when he had to decide on leaving the Navy without any job. "Just how DO you work 'outside'?" he asked me.

After leaving, he eventually joined Underwater Maintenance Company and was very successful in developing his Civvy career with them - albeit still working for the Navy. He was mainly employed in survey work for them, as well as being responsible for health & safety issues. And - with his sense of humour, as you can well imagine - he gave us some absolutely riveting stories about the dirty underside of ship's bottoms!! Mike worked for UMC right through until he could no longer drive a car, and even then, was still trying to do his paperwork at home!

From simple seaman right through to Fleet Chief, on Flag Officer Fleet staff, he displayed a real talent for leadership of the finest quality. He was tough, disciplined and a perfectionist to some. But his desire for

this was always tempered with humanity and kindness, for example in coaching and training people, he tried hard never to let people just fail. Do you remember him with the very successful Portsmouth Field Gun team and runs at the Royal Tournament?

Many will remember him as honest, dedicated and very loyal person. It was evident in service to his family and friends, as much as to the Navy of course. And he regularly made sure he showed us what his high personal values stood for too. He also had a tremendous sense of humour. For example, there was that time when he and another great friend Dave Marshall arrived at our door demanding my 'Pusser's' rum store which had been given to me as a Navy leaving present. I could go on and on. I know his family have always been very proud of him, as he was extremely proud of his whole family.

**"CHEERS. MY VERY DEAR FRIEND".**

**Dick Randell March, 2003 - previously with H.M.S. Phoebe from 1965 to 1968**

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In 1977 someone aboard the frigate had a baby Christened and the ship's bell was used. That baby is now asking if anyone knows where that bell is as he now wants his baby Christened in it. I do not know his full name as it was an email with just Jenna for a name. I think the bell is the one in Bournemouth Town Hall, I have passed that info on, hope I am right. Roy.

Please note: in the members list I have typed an error in a shipmates name and address. Please change the details to read:- Christopher Stonestreet - \*\*\*\*\* Tel - \*\*\*\*\* Year 1970/73. Sorry for the mistakes shipmate.

One day the Arkansas County Sheriff saw Billy-Bob walking around town with nothing on but his boots. The sheriff says, "Billy-Bob, what the hell are you doing walking around town like that?" Billy-Bob replies, "Well sheriff, me and Mary-Lou was down on the farm and we started a cuddling and a kissing, Mary-Lou said we should go into the barn, and we did. Inside the barn we did some more cuddling and a kissing, and things got pretty hot and heavy. Well, then Mary-Lou took off all her clothes, and said I should do the same. So I took all my clothes off, except my boots, then Mary-Lou lays herself on the hay and says, "Okay Billy Bob. let's go to town", hah guess I'm the first one back".

S/m Abe Coralan remembers vividly playing cricket at Chatham during his training period. Abe was batting, and S/m Fred Silk was in the 'silly mid off' position. Abe was doing well hitting the ball all over the field. One of his terrific batting strokes hit the ball hard against Fred Silks shin. Fred yelled with pain, then angrily told Abe he would be out next ball. The next ball came hurtling down the wicket, Abe stepped out to take a swipe at it, the ball skidded off the turf and caught him in the nether regions, and Abe was given out! Abe reckons it was a case of B...s B W. He sends his regards to Fred, and was sorry to hear about Fred's illness, but hopes he is doing okay.

Here's another one: A young woman had just been dumped by her boyfriend and was devastated. She decided that life was not worth living, so she walked down to the docks and out to the end of the pier. She stood there gathering up courage to jump when a young man grabbed her. He told her, "I am a seaman sailing for America in the morning and I'll smuggle you aboard my ship and take good care of you" The young woman agreed, and he smuggled aboard, hiding her in a life-boat. Every day he would bring her food, and for a reward they would make passionate love. This went on for THREE WEEKS! One day the Captain was inspecting the ship and lifted the cover off the lifeboat where the young woman was hiding. He started to interrogate her and she told him of the young sailor who had saved her and was being so nice to her and was going to smuggle her ashore when they reached America. The Captain said "Young lady, This ship is the Isle of Wight Ferry"!!!!!!

**(Reminds me somewhat of my time aboard a HDML, supposedly going to Ireland!!).**

**PLEASE NOTE:-**

Due to a tight security check on visitors to the Town Hall, we have to submit a list of names in advance of those, who, after the dedication service, wish to visit the 101 Club for Refreshments, or the Bar. Would you please phone me if you will be visiting.. If the answer phone comes on please leave a message, or phone later. This will also help with the catering. I will try and get permission for us to visit the Phoebe Room while we are there.

There is a lift to the fourth floor

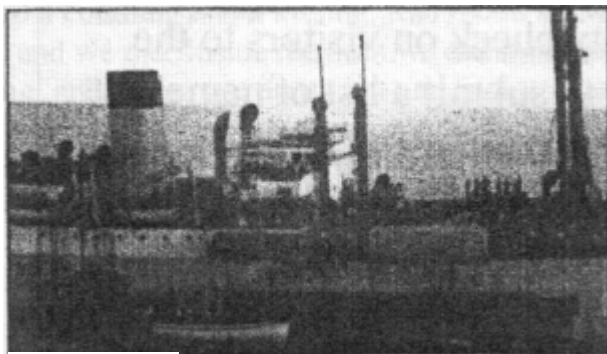
## *Palastine Patrol*

They were hot, sunny, and somewhat lazy days in July and August, 1947, when Widemouth Bay arrived off the coast of Palestine, one of four Hay class frigates hastily summoned back from our Far East role to augment the fleet of small ships whose task it was to stop illegal immigrants reaching the burgeoning Jewish homeland across the beach. At least that was the way it seemed as we steamed monotonously up and down the eight-mile Horseneck patrol station in front of Tel Aviv and Jaffa. I even fell a little cheated. Don't get me wrong, I never wanted closer involvement in the troubles, I don't think anybody did; it was just that if we didn't have to be involved I would rather have been left in Hong Kong

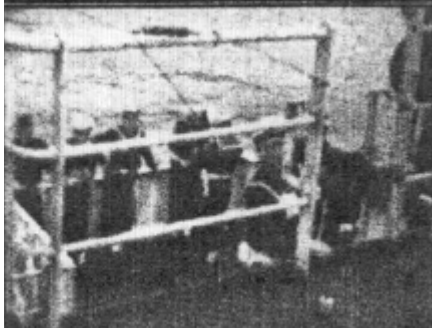
I knew, of course, that that was being flippant, but the more serious side of things seemed vague and distant, though no doubt not to those who had been training and preparing for boarding operations. I was reminded of this by a book I recently picked up; *The Royal Navy and the Palestine Patrol*, by Ninian Stewart. Keeping personnel informed was a problem voiced by at least one senior officer at the time and quoted in the book. Probably the most serious incident in the time of the patrols was the interception of the President Warfield which involved repeated boarding runs by four destroyers, some succeeding in getting across just two or three boarders who were isolated and roughed up by angry mobs. There were serious injuries and an American crew member of the Warfield died before resistance ceased. The 1,800 immigrants on Warfield were eventually returned to Germany, with trouble all along the way. That interception

took place on July 18... one day before the Widemouth Bay arrived at Haifa for the first time and we went straight out on the 19th, to patrol the waters off Tel Aviv where it happened. We never saw newspapers and rarely heard radio news, and I was never conscious of what had happened at the time - or of another close-to-home story from a month or so before. St Bride's Bay lost an officer and two men when their boat capsized in the surf at a beach interception.

Many more details of the campaign emerge in the book, which is one of a series of Naval Staff Histories published by Cass, and which contains accounts of all ships which attempted to beat the blockade, of the policies and tactics thrashed out and adopted. Attempts to disable immigrant ships' propellers proved futile, but boarding ramps, wire cages, tear gas. Chinese crackers and "Zulu" shields were all used as well as, occasionally, firearms. And (prepare to wince) boxes like those worn by cricketers were ordered as a defence against immigrant ladies wielding hat pins.

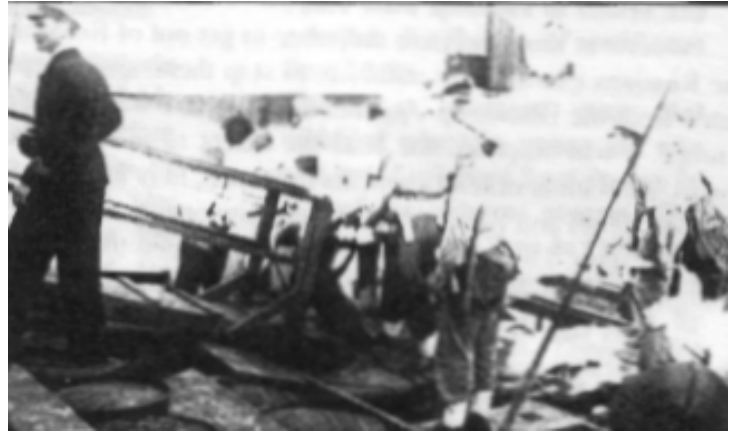


Phoebe's boarding party boards Pan Crescent (above) and on the bridge.



There is an account of the comparatively placid arrival of the immigrant ship Luciano M, better known as Little Willie on board Widemouth Bay, which escorted her in as she was boarded by Providence. Another

follows of the interception of Pan York and Pan Crescent by a substantial fleet including the Phoebe, to which I was transferred from Widemouth Bay in October. These two, the largest ships ever to attempt the blockade, picked up 8,000 immigrants each in Bulgaria. Rumours were rife on naval ships about the horrific defences rigged to deter boarders. They appeared through the Dardanelle's on December 29, 1947, and after two days of negotiations agreed to be boarded and taken to Cyprus provided passengers keep their baggage, boarding parties would not carry weapons and there would be no discrimination against Pan crews. All this was agreed. On board Pan Crescent, which Phoebe boarded, the master never appeared and negotiations were mainly in the hands of "Ike," thought to have been the navigator and now known to have previously been the master of the Warfield.



Stretcher parties remove a sick immigrant

Jews at this time were desperate to get out of Romania and Bulgaria before the Russians exerted their authority to stop them, and many immigrant ships now came from the Black Sea. Another factor in this was a tougher attitude in western Europe. I was surprised to read the extent to which central European governments, substantial official elements in France, Italy and Yugoslavia, and the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Authority openly aided the illegal immigrants in the early days. Later British diplomacy persuaded them that there had to be some control or there would be open warfare in the Middle East

This was the crux of the problem. Few in the rest of the world, least of all the Americans, accepted what the British were trying to do; we soon had to get out and the war has never stopped.

In any case it was never a popular role for the Navy so soon after World War II in which the Jews suffered in appalling ways. This was shown in one of Phoebe's final roles in the affair. Three times in the spring of 1948 we were used as a transit station in Haifa, transferring immigrants from newly intercepted vessels across to the transports that would take them to Famagusta. That involved searching baggage for weapons and DDT-spraying them, and was not a straightforward task with some immigrants still showing defiance, but on the whole was carried out with compassion.

Many immigrants had to be helped, even with babies, and getting the sick and wounded, some seriously wounded, out of the disgustingly crowded, filthy, stinking and unsanitary holds was difficult and delicate. I can never forget lowering a stretcher with a man who had broken his back, over the side into a lighter. Four of us let out lines to the four corners of the stretcher, endeavouring to keep it level. The man was ghastly terrified at each lurch... and so was I.



A helping hand for an immigrant during one of the transit operations

There was one curious finale which seemed to suggest that even some Jews approved the British policy in the end. The British mandate finished on May 15, 1948 and on May 13 the Borea was intercepted carrying 243 illegal immigrants. H.M.S. Chieftain, her escort, suggested that if she stooed around outside territorial waters for 48 hours she could land where she chose but her master unaccountably elected to be escorted into Cyprus, and her passengers

were being dispersed into the camps as the British left.

Malta Invicta Reunion, London  
(Vic Chanter)

On Friday 21<sup>st</sup> February, Marjorie and I met Jim Hutchison and his son-in-law at the Victory Services Club, London, on the occasion of the Malta Invicta Reunion. The venue had been planned for the Imperial War Museum, but the number of those attending exceeded the amount that could be catered for.

The event was an open invitation to all veterans who had helped Malta during its siege in WWII. Some of us had been present in Malta, September 2002 for its 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Operation Pedestal. Therefore I was delighted to see Jim again, and to see him looking so well.

On my arrival at the club, a youngish lady who said she was from Geneva approached me, asked me what ship I had been on and was delighted when I told her HMS Phoebe.

She had been following the recent Malta saga for some time and had received all the e mail that had passed to and fro. Hence she had learned about the veteran Jim Hutchison, and his operation at Guy's Hospital. She had been in London at that time and had considered, as a gesture, visiting him in hospital but, being a stranger, decided against it.

You've got the link, the lady wanted to meet the man who had gone through so much and, of course, I was the catalyst to bring that about. The story of my life.

There were speeches of course and a further distribution of certificates from Malta.

The most poignant story that unfolded was of a young lad who was saved, plucked from the sea by one of the veterans present. This 'young lad' now lives in California and the veteran was called up on stage to receive a message by telephone from him. There really should have been a mobile telephone link as the Californian walked into the hall talking, but you know Murphy's Law! The phone wouldn't ring! So they had to fall back on "Surprise, Surprise!". Still there was an emotional meeting.

How do you thank someone for saving your life by dragging you out of the oggin?

The person who plucked the young man from the burning sea was awarded the Albert Medal, which was later exchanged for the George Cross. He now lives in a Senior Citizens Home in Didcot, and is a member of my RNA Branch.

Roy