

*HMS Phoebe
Association
Newsletter
April 2006*



*Geoff Flewitt
&
partner Margaret*

I start the newsletter on a sombre note and regret to inform you of the sudden death of shipmate Geoff Flewitt who passed away in his sleep on Tuesday, 14th February. The funeral was held at the Bramcote Crematorium, Nottingham, on Friday 24th Feb at 1140 am.

In attendance were S/m Vic & Marjorie Chanter accompanied by Lil and myself. Beeston Branch and County Ganges Association Standards and one from the Federation of Ships Associations were paraded. The large chapel was full of relations and friends. It was Geoff's wish that the service be a simple one and he be laid to rest wearing his Phoebe jacket and Phoebe tie.

Geoff's family expressed their wish for the £250 Geoff had in his Phoebe reunion savings account be donated to the Associations Welfare Fund. A letter of thanks and gratitude has been sent to the his family.

S/m Silvester Coote, do you recollect the name? Known to have been aboard the cruiser when the King & Queen embarked for Ireland.

His grandson Mark would like to hear from you. Phone me and I will obtain his address for you.

Scarborough coaches: There are just a few seats left on both coaches. If you have not put your names down for one or both trips, please do so now. I am sorry about the £2 charge per seat, but like everything else prices go up alarmingly. Lil will be collecting the money on the Friday; tickets will be issued. Although it states you cannot get into the hotel until 4 pm this means your rooms may not be ready until then. You can still use the hotel to park your bags or use their facilities. I suggest if you are arriving by car you find a parking space, and get a parking permit from reception. Either walk or bus it into town if so minded.

Some subscriptions are now long overdue, if you have not paid yours yet you will find a reminder in this newsletter. Please send ASAP. Association accounts must be up to date for the AGM in May.

Sorry to say there is no change in S/m Ron Franklin's health, he is still in hospital and unable to leave his bed. Our thoughts are with you Ron and hope that there you get better soon.

Reunion 2007

A long way off but we have to look into places to hold it. Portsmouth has been suggested, and I have been searching the area for a suitable venue.

The Royal Sailors Home is one that I have been asked to survey. Weekends are available at the moment during the latter part of April 2007 and May. But! A 3-night bargain break in April is £122 pp and £132 pp in May. This is on a daily BBD basis except for Saturday night dinner, which would be extra. The ballroom is available for Saturday night only. This is the only time we would not have to share facilities with other guests. There are only 10 parking spaces; other parking is in the NCP nearby. With the extra costs for Saturday Dinner and NCP Parking estimated cost would be in the region of £150/£170 pp

In Southsea is the Best Western Beach Hotel. Most weekends in April and May are available. Group dinner bed and breakfast rate is £51 per night, £10 more for a single room. A function room is included. (Normal rate is £95 per night pp.). Total pp double/twin £153. Single £183 pp. Car Parking is free. The above package is only available if 60 or more rooms are reserved.

The Holiday Inn Hotel. Per day = DBB Twin/Double = £100pp. Single = £75 pp. A supplement is charged for private Saturday Dinner according to menu chosen. 3 nights is £300 + pp. i.e. £600+ for double/ twin. £225+ single.

I am in touch with the King Charles at Gillingham and waiting for their brochure. At the moment the weekend of 11th - 14th May 2007 is available. It appears that the hotel has been enlarged; they now have 83 rooms and various indoor leisure activity areas. (Brochure now received):

2006 - 3 Night weekend package

2 nights Table d'hote dinner, bed & breakfast. 1 night four course Gala dinner, bed & breakfast. £116 per person sharing twin/double room. £145 per person in a single room. (Advise sharing a twin with a friend and save 13 quid each. Sec) The Banquet Dinner is available to any shipmate just visiting for the day. Cost £23 per person. Free car park. Various Health and Fitness facilities inc. swim pool and Games rooms. Frequent bus service to Chatham & Rochester, also the Historic Dockyard is a short walk away.

(Table d'hote is a French phrase which literally means host's table but is used to indicate a menu where multi-course meals with limited choices are charged at a fixed rate).

2 new shipmates for your members list:

No 220 - David White - O/Sea - 1971/74

No 221 - Paul Corrigan - ME1 (frigate - Year ?????)

I had a e-mail from Mark Coote who is seeking information regarding his grandfather **Silvester Coote**, who served aboard the Cruiser at the time the King and Queen were transported to Ireland. Did you know him? If so, let me know and I will email Mark.

Welcome home S/m Stuart and Yvonne Bundy, we hope your stay in Kiwi land was enjoyable. Also Eric & Vera Carman who cruised the Caribbean and visited Florida, hope you will bring the Florida sun with you to the reunion.

Shipmate Jim & Pat Mayer celebrate their Diamond wedding anniversary on 20th April, Congratulations to you both from all the members. (A card or two would be nice)

Famagusta

By Vic Chanter

On 10th October 1941, I was drafted to Famagusta in Cyprus to join a crew that was organised to administer the arrivals and departures of merchant and Royal Naval vessels. Amongst this Royal Navy detachment I was surprised to meet up with two ex-members of HMS Phoebe, Joe Bye and Yeoman Kite.

I wasn't prepared, however, for my induction into this unit. I had by this time, you will have gathered, joined various ships and establishments but had never been greeted by the senior officer in charge – admiral, skipper etc. This time the great panjandrum himself confronted me and took the wind out of my sails by welcoming me personally into this small company. I wasn't prepared for his welcoming speech, however, which was to the effect that he had prior knowledge of my history and, should I step out of line, I could stand by for the proverbial book-throwing. What the hell was he talking about? I thought perhaps he had been drafted to this outpost on account of shellshock. From the Phoebe, Joe Bye was a great pal of Ken Kent and me, and Yeoman Kite didn't bear me any grudges. Shorty Wakefield – the old arch-enemy (of every-one) — wasn't on the scene. I'd been on the Phoebe for the last 11 months. Where had I stepped out of line?

The main duties involved the everyday running of the harbour activities. Most of us were communication ratings and manned the signal base at the harbour. Along with messengers we carried out duties in the signal office, but our main duty was manning the fort that over-looked the harbour. The fort was called The Othello Tower, which along with a mast was fitted out as a ship's bridge. From this

vantage point we signalmen had a marvellous view across the harbour and out to sea, the ideal site for visual communication with vessels.

From the fort and harbour the view inland was the massive stone wall of the Old Town with a gigantic 'gate' - a heavy solid door with no suggestion as to what was beyond. We soon learned that the wall completely encircled the Turkish Quarter, which was (unofficially) 'out-of-bounds' to us.

The journey between our billets and the tower was through the dockyard, along the loading bays, where piles of pungent smelling produce seemed to prevail; these I believe were sacks of eucalyptus seed pods. Everywhere orange and lemon groves abounded.

Although the living facilities were basic, we managed to follow a healthy diet with fresh produce. I well remember breakfasts with oatmeal porridge.

Evenings in the town found most of us in the bars, which everyone called 'cabarets'. It didn't take long to discover the bottles of local wine at 11- (one shilling), and the more palatable Comanderia at 1/6. The beer was 3/- a bottle.

As 'residents' we knew just how far to go with our cabaret crawls, especially so as some of the Cypriot lads didn't take kindly to British sailors with money mixing and dancing with the local girls. There was talk of a few contretemps before I arrived on the island, with tables and chairs flying around.

One evening, whilst I was in the billet on standby, at least one hothead going ashore was preparing himself for any trouble from the local gangs by arming himself with a 'defensive weapon' – an iron bar. I believe his colleague had been attacked, so he was being prepared.

I didn't have to go on duty, so I was still in the billet when a few of the libertymen returned earlier than usual. The story told to us was that as our lads were riding along in the usual horse drawn transport - a gharry - a gang of locals set upon them, grabbed the iron bar and, turning the tables, whacked the would-be hothead and broke his arm.

On a few occasions Famagusta would be visited by libertymen from a visiting RN vessel. We 'locals' would then have to be on our guard as with beer, at 3/- a bottle, the visitors turned to the unfamiliar, palatable cheaper beverage, which took effect quicker than the beer to which they were accustomed, thus causing a speedier entry into the paralytic state. Whatever state they got in to, and whatever disturbance they caused, we had to live there after they returned to their ships.

Most of these cabarets (bars) had a balcony at the end of the room, and a local group sat up there playing their own familiar music. One got used to it and it was danceable.

One thing it wasn't wise to do was to sit below the balcony anywhere within throwing distance. It didn't happen often, but if a fracas did occur, you could be the unlucky recipient of a surplus chair; however, you might just get away with an extra drink plus the glass and/or the bottle donated from above.

Sometimes we danced with the girls. Some were employed by the establishment to encourage the sale of drinks for the punters and them-selves. The champagne and exotic drinks were of course never what they were supposed to be, as we were aware, and that was another cause of trouble with the visiting matelots.

Enjoying a night, listening and dancing to the music like any other evening, I saw the door fly open, but instead of a gang of troublemakers a frail, agitated young girl ran in. She quickly looked around, spotted me and started towards my table. As she approached I recognised her as one of two girls who had cycled by our billets some days before. I had been out on the balcony and we had waved and called out to each other. I had been really struck by her beauty. This evening she looked distraught and moved quickly from the door, looking about and behind her. As our eyes met it seemed that a look of relief came over her face. She immediately made her way over to me. She didn't ask me to buy her a drink or to dance with her, but to escort her home as, despite her age, she had been drinking, and was being harassed by someone.

We left the bar and I hailed a gharry. With her instructions the driver took us to her flat where she and her friend lived. She made very sure that the driver didn't over-charge me, and then we went inside where I was introduced to her friend, who I recognised from the few days before. After a while I left, decided to call it a night, and walked back to our billet.

The following day I was called to the balcony to see, in the road below, the two girls who obviously wanted to speak to me. Melpomene was the name of the one I had taken home – though she wished to be called Mary and her friend Martha – and she started to give me the gharry fare that I had spent on her. It was a lovely gesture and a new one on me. From then on we became close friends. Age didn't seem to be a problem in Cyprus.

I suppose one was inclined to get lazy; the routine was somewhat boring after life at sea. In such an atmosphere little things become memorable. Perhaps that is why I recall vividly a few of us, who were off-duty, `chasing' a rat around our living quarters, and more so because with a reflex action I made a terrible mess of the rodent with the sweeping brush I was wielding. Things quietened down once again after such excitement.

Some of us did infiltrate the Turkish Quarter, but it was so late at night and there was not a soul about in the darkness of that walled town with its shuttered homes.

Soon after this I became ill, not a lot, but the Doc seemed to think I could be

spared for a spell of hospital recuperation. At least it was a different routine, better food, but even more boring.

On my return to normal duties and plainer food, I decided to forego the evening meal and wait to have something later in town. After the hospital food I could only face a light meal and I hadn't been in a bar for a while, so it was everything in moderation.

I returned to base to find all hell had broken loose. According to some one I should have been on duty and not watch-ashore. Therefore I was 'absent from place of duty'.

My offence was of such gravity that it went as far as the Shell-shocked One's report. I hadn't seen him since my first day there, and I can't say that I missed him. He obviously thought the same about me and promptly ordered a Court Martial. I was duly marched away for the time being. When my 'day in court' arrived I was marched into the open of the quayside, below the tower, where the ship's company were fell-in to witness this horrible criminal being sentenced. An act such as he had committed would, in the midst of battle, have carried the ultimate penalty. In the event, a defence was not an option; it was just a case of meting out the punishment – 28 days detention, PD1.

At a time convenient to the authorities regarding transport and driver, along with the obligatory guard, two webbing-and-gaitered ratings, I was transported in the back of a closed van to HM Prison at Nicosia. Well actually it was the island's prison, a large proportion of which the British army had commandeered.

When my chauffeur and escort dropped me off at my destination they left with their condolences and returned to Famagusta and their humdrum routine, whereas, for the next few weeks, I would never have the opportunity to become bored.

Nicosia
Vic Chanter

The sergeant who 'doubled' me around the joining procedure at speed did so, he said, because if I hung about too much I would miss dinner. I think he was talking about his dinner. From a board listing the rules and regulations of the camp (prison) I tried, as instructed, to read how to make my stay as pleasant as possible, but dinner called and proved a challenge to my aspirations. I was promptly doubled away to collect mess gear and to join the open-air queue for midday rations. Being Royal Navy I was a curiosity, and became the centre of attraction, but the only ones talking were the members of staff. I had to learn to behave like a squaddie.

I was issued with an army blanket and learned how to fold it for inspection and

when not in use. With what was necessary to keep me going whilst I was there, I was shown to my cell, which was at the end of a small corridor that housed six cells — three either side. None of the others were occupied. From the end wall, looking sideways through the bars, I was just able to see through the bars to the end of the corridor. The room beyond had what appeared to be benches; then I could make out blankets folded at the head. I realised that I was looking at the main living/sleeping quarters for the rest of the prisoners. The benches were their beds. I was in solitary confinement, for whose benefit I wasn't sure. My cage had a bench with another blanket, which I would have to fold in a certain way when not in use, and for inspections, and in one corner was a bucket.

Around 4 or 5 o'clock someone approached my accommodation to serve tea – a thick lump of bread with a portion (a triangle) of cheese and water poured into my issued mug.

During the early evening with just my thoughts for company, I sat on my bunk and eventually stretched out in comfort. All I could hear were footsteps of heavy boots and the clanging of doors and gates. Then someone was rattling my bars and roaring at me. "ON YOUR FEET, LAD!" I was on my feet. "You do not sit or lay down until 8pm.

Commandant's Report in the morning." Next morning I learned that with good behaviour my sentence of 28 days could be reduced to 24 days. Unfortunately, because of my hurried induction into this establishment, I had not read as far as Rule 26, and consequently I would forfeit 2 days remission of sentence. Now only another 25 days to go. After four days of solitary cell time and exercise, the Staff Sergeant decided that the RN treatment was a bit harsh and allowed me to join the rest of the criminals in the main hall. After that I was able to learn a few tricks of the trade.

I owned a Gillette razor, which took single-edged blades. Unable to get a replacement blade I had to scrape along as best I could. The washing facilities were in the open with several cold water taps running into a trough. Each morning we 'slopped out', and on a few occasions I took my turn to trundle the resultant effluent along to the cesspit.

Among the main duties during the day was an activity, which brought back memories of the chain-gang movies – breaking up rocks. Now I learned the answer to it all. Large rocks broken into smaller and even smaller rocks laid along a prepared site were the basis for the new roads in the camp. A group of us had to manhandle a roller, twice the size and weight of those used on cricket pitches, along each prepared length, to mash the stones into the hard ground.

Where did we get the large rocks? I learned the answer when they knew I could be trusted. A gang of inmates, under guard, was allowed out of the compound, just beyond the gates, with a suitable receptacle to gather the necessary material

from an outcrop of rocks. There was talk among the hard cases that mates who had been released put cigarettes under certain stones for them.

These cigarettes, when found, would be secreted into improvised pockets slit into the epaulets of the battledress, or any other double thickness that could be found on the uniform. Despite the security guards, we were always searched on our return. Some of the warders were Cypriot guards and apparently were not beyond being bribed to bring in contraband goods.

Each day, a time was set aside for reports of the war to be read to the privileged few in the exercise yard. It was all to do with the army, and I was hearing for the first time about action in places like Kuala Lumpur, and further afield. It was a hard life, but somebody had to do it.

After 26 days of exemplary behaviour on my part, my transport arrived from Famagusta, and I left this school of life no longer bored, with my face well scraped, my mind sharpened and my body now well honed, Fortunately, I didn't have to drift back into the old ways, as the NOIC (Naval Officer in Charge) kindly got me on a corvette on passage to Beirut and Haifa.

From there I travelled by train back to Alexandria.

Phoebe Wood Abingdon (Trafalgar 200 Woods) After a few unanswered phone calls and emails I have at last heard from the woods construction organiser. Sorry to say the date of opening has been changed from June to 13th May, (our reunion weekend). This time it cannot be changed due to other commitments of organisations attending. Unfortunately we will not be represented. However I am to meet with the organiser to see the work that has been done, and maybe arrange a later date when we, and the TS Phoebe cadets, can attend, and maybe have our own small ceremony. The extra large Phoebe crest I have will however be in a prominent position at the official opening. It is too large and heavy for us to use, both the TS HQ and Bournemouth Town Hall already have one on display. While visiting the TS Phoebe HQ last year I was shown a navy blue polo shirt with the Phoebe crest embroidered, I ordered two with the association cruiser type crest. I now have on order 8 medium and 4 large, 6 with the frigate crest and 6 with the cruiser crest. These will be on sale at the reunion, £8 each. I can order more of each if required, Postage will be charged if the need arises.



or

Sudoku:- There were no correct answers to the puzzle received. Not too late to send your answer in, I will hold it open until May 1st

Reunion savings:- Have you got savings in the fund? If you have, do you want cash at the reunion, or a cheque sent before the reunion. If it is cash please let Lil know by the end of April so she can withdraw it from the bank. NB: *Is your bank Barclays? Phoebe **cheques** will clear at 3pm the day deposited. Other banks take 5 working days to clear.*

I very much regret to inform you that S/m George Baines sadly "crossed the bar" suddenly on Feb 12th. George had suffered from Parkinson's disease for several years, but it was a severe heart attack that caused his death. Information arrived too late to attend the funeral. A letter, and sympathy card has been sent to wife Jane, and family. (Notification **received** 17th March)

HAVEN'T YOU PAID YOUR SUBS YET! DO IT NOW