

# H.M.S. Phoebe Association



## Newsletter

August 2003

Sec's Report: It may only be a short newsletter this time. I have not had any items sent in, so it will be back to the library again!

The Bournemouth hotel trouble we had is now in the past, some good must come of the inspections etc. that may well have been carried out by now, although probably no one will experience the same treatment we received from the management.

Now we come to the arrangements for our next reunion. Usually by this time I would be sending out reservation forms, but I am afraid it is not possible at the moment. We are experiencing great difficulty in acquiring accommodation in York. It is amazing how few hotels there are in York that have more than thirty rooms, those that do have sufficient rooms carry a huge price, I have not been able to obtain a weekend package deal at all, most hotels will only quote a daily tariff~ even the Moat House Hotel is costly i.e.: - Double/Twin Room DB&B £126.00 - - Single Room DB&B £90.00. That means you would be paying £252 for a short weekend in a Double/Twin Room, and £180 for a single room. (Plus £150 for the AGM).

York is a tourist centre and is one of the main attractions for the American market and other nationals; this keeps the prices high. I was quoted £1500 at one hotel for the hire of a room for our AGM, I stated that we would not need anything special, and it would last for approx an hour, we could hire the Albert Hall for that price?

So it appears York is out of the question. I looked around in that area for an alternative, and ended up in Scarborough, we have been there before and, although it is a nice enough place and it is a few more miles further than York, it is also a bit on the hilly side going into town or to the sea front from the hotels! I can't remember if there was a bus service? It is mostly on street parking, but now I understand tourists are issued with free parking notices by their hotel.

I have been offered a package deal, which includes coach trips, by the Isle of White Tours, the package will be organised by their organiser, some of you may recognise the name Mike Crowe (REUNITED). We will still do our own thing as normal, but this is a way of getting a hotel at a rate affordable to us, and is a quote for three nights. I have informed the committee of the aforesaid, and all agree that York is out.

I understand by the phone calls I have been getting that most of you (if not all) noticed my "deliberate" mistake on the cover of the last newsletter, where I put 2004 instead of 2003, sorry about that.

There are still several members who have not paid their subscription for this year. 2002/03. I am sure it is only through forgetfulness, but if it is because they are too ill, can someone let me know. We do not stop sending newsletters to you unless asked not to, and reminders are always in the newsletter we send. Subscriptions for the coming year 2003/04 are due in September; some members have paid in advance so this will not relate to them. The October and December's issue will have separate reminders in them for those who are not up to date.

We had four resignations last year. Alan Morphew, Bob Gardner, Colin Speed, and Jesse Owen, not any fault of the Association, but other commitments and ill health were the reasons given. But we also had new members join, please add these details to your members list: -

(Associated) No 178A Fitzsimmons, Peter - Ex RN Fleet Chief Elec

(Full) No 195 Owen, Brian - LRO(W) 1968/71

(Full) No 196 Abbott, Colin - CPO 1982/86.

(Full) No 197 Wilkinson, Dave - A/B Radar 1970/72

The TS Phoebe will be holding their annual Trafalgar Night Dinner on the 18th October at the Yenton Hotel, Bournemouth. The cost of the dinner is £16.50 pp. At the moment S/m Ernie Clewes is negotiating with the hotels NEW (Yes! it has changed hands again), management for a discount on overnight accommodation. This annual dinner has been well attended by shipmates in the past, and has always been a entertaining evening with good food followed by dancing. I shall be taking Lillian to the venue, and hope other shipmates will be able to join us. Shipmates wishing to attend this venue, would you please phone me, there is no rush at the moment, I have not officially been given a cut off date, but if I make it the 30th September, that will give you plenty of time to decide if you will be attending, there will be another newsletter before the venue with the full details enclosed, in the meantime phone me for information.

We shall also be attending the Armistice Day Memorial Service in Central Gardens, Bournemouth where we shall be laying a wreath at our Memorial, there is plenty of time before that happens, so more info' on that venue in the October newsletter.

## WELFARE

I regret to report the passing of Associated Member Joan Pettman. Joan, the wife of S/m Gordon Pettman, had been suffering from cancer, and succumbed to it on Friday 27th June 2003. The funeral took place at 2 pm on Monday July 7th at Barham Crematorium, Kent. Lillian and I attended on behalf of the Association. Family Flowers only. A donation was made to the League of Friends at the request of Joan's family.

No one has informed me of any new illnesses, or hospitalisations, so there is nothing new to report. We hope that Jimmy Dunlop is doing okay, I have not heard from him lately, also S/m George Baines, who is suffering from Hodgkinsons and Osteoporosis but is still able to write me a note of thanks, keep your pecker up George, and I hope the two Kens have been in touch again.

Sid Hall continues to improve. I have not heard from Harry Blackhurst so I do not know how 'Rattler' Morgan is doing; no news is good news as they say, so let's hope that applies to everyone. We have not heard from Peter Potts, we hope he is getting better.

There have been numerous increases in State Benefits, probably only by pennies. But I have enclosed a copy of the increases that I received with my RNA Correspondence, just in case you never knew, or read about them. If you have not read them or seen them lets hope you are in for a big surprise??

Lil and I will be off on our usual summer jaunt to our daughter's cottage in Cornwall on Sunday 3rd August, we will be away for about two weeks.

I have not heard from I of W Tours yet, so the result may not get into this newsletter, but I will keep you posted. 26 members replied to my request for names for the reunion. I am hoping more of you have decided to go; it would be nice if I could quote enough members going so that we do not have to share the hotel facilities.

I have been asked if it would be possible to have members Email addresses in the members list. We could, but it would mean a different layout, and if, like it often happens, a member changes his ISP 'as & when', it would mean a lot of notices in newsletters of that address change, not all of us have the means of sending emails. So I will send out a list of all email addresses sent to me separate to the members list. If you want to be included in this list just email me your full name and the Email address you want printed, as it is holiday time, I will make the list up for delivery with the October newsletter, that gives you at least eight weeks to send your email.

As I will be visiting Falmouth during my stay in Cornwall, we will take the opportunity to call in on S/m Ron Gill. The last time we heard from him he was getting over his by-pass op and hoping to be at the reunion in Bournemouth, but he never got there.

Lil has asked me to remind you that she now has new blazer badges, the price is still the same £9. She is also including the 2003/2004 sub's form in with this newsletter; if you do not receive a form it means your subs are up to date. She will let you know when they are next due. Subs and form should be returned by end of September.

It is Friday 1st August now, and I still have not got anything settled regarding next year's reunion. I was hoping to have something by now; I cannot wait any longer before printing this.

I am counting on all those who raised their hands at the last AGM for a York reunion will be coming to the next one??

It was nice to see the rain again after such a long spell of really hot weather. I had a lot to do in the garden but never got round to it, it was too hot to do anything, so the weeds shot up and the flowers died off through lack of water. I did have some unusual sunflowers this year, I have never been successful in growing them before, these were different they shot up and branched out, three or four buds to each branch, with a lovely bronze coloured flower that went brown after a while. I tried taking a photo of it, but I could not get its true colour to come out, it kept printing it in red, the only sunflowers I have seen have all been yellow flower heads. If I can I will get some seeds.

Not having much news to relate, I have resorted to the Naval History book again, I hope I have not printed this before.

“SUBSMASH” Those were the words we never wanted to hear, the words may have changed now, but the meaning will be the same.

Ever since submarines first began to be developed seriously at the beginning of the 19th century, there has been a steady stream of accidents. These have often been due to the many novel design problems that must be dealt with in the development of a completely new type of vessel, but many have been caused by human error.

Submarines are not affected by some dangers faced by other ships - their enclosed hulls are extremely seaworthy, and can escape bad weather simply by diving beneath the waves - but their cramped quarters, dependence on limited air supplies while submerged, and the difficulty of escape make them especially vulnerable in the event of fire or power failure. On the surface there is still the danger of collision, and it was just such an accident that led to the worlds worst ever submarine disaster, when the French submarine *Surcouf* was run down by an American freighter in the Caribbean in 1942. The *Surcouf* was a massive boat of 4,218 tons submerged displacement; her deck carried a turret with two 8-inch guns and a hangar containing a seaplane plus a 16ft boarding launch. When she went down, she took all her 159 men with her.

Britain's worst submarine accident took place in Liverpool Bay in 1939. *HMS Thetis* had recently completed building, and on June 1st 1939 she headed down the Mersey for her first diving trials. On board was her normal crew of 5 officers and 48 men, but on this occasion an extra 50

people, including civilian experts as well as naval personnel, were crammed into her cramped hull. As soon as she began to dive, her skipper knew something was not right - the bows seemed too buoyant. So as the dive continued, he sent an officer forward to check the torpedo tubes, which ought to have been flooded. There were ten tubes numbers one to four were dry, he went on to number five. He made the standard checks before opening the inner door first, he noted that the bow cap indicator was in the closed position he then opened the test cock, a narrow pipe containing a tap that lets water trickle through if the tube is flooded There was no water from the test cock, so he opened the tube's inner door - and thousands of gallons of water came flooding into the torpedo room.

Unable to close the door against the pressure, the officer struggled aft with the water level rising around his knees, and managed to close the watertight door at the second bulkhead, this contained the flooding. But the now bow heavy submarine dived down and buried her bow in the soft mud of the sea-floor, 160 ft below the surface. The ballast tanks were blown, but the 275 ft vessel assumed a position with her bows on the mud and her stern just clearing the surface.

By now it was evening, and a search for the overdue submarine had begun. Meanwhile, the captain had decided to wait until dawn before putting people out through the escape hatches as there was no sign of a rescue boat having arrived and escapees would probably die of exposure if they were not picked up immediately.

The crippled sub was reached by the destroyer *HMS Brazen* at 0630, and by 0800 the first two men reached the surface via the escape hatch. But the air in the sub was already foul and time was running out for those still trapped. It took 30 minutes to blow the water out of the escape chamber each time it was used, and after the first exit, the inner hatch was opened too soon, allowing a few gallons of water to pour into the hull. This flowed forward and shorted electrical equipment, causing a small fire which, though swiftly extinguished, consumed a lot of precious oxygen.

Painfully aware that oxygen was fast running out, the officer in charge squeezed four people into an escape chamber designed for two, but when the outer hatch did not open and the chamber was drained there were three dead men inside, and a fourth near to death. They relied again with two men, who reached the surface safely, but they were the last to

escape. Time had run out for the 99 men still inside the *Thetis*. Eventually, the submarine was salvaged. Refitted and renamed Thunderbolt, she served in WWII until sunk by an Italian ship with the loss of a further 63 lives.

Investigators later found that the bow cap indicators on *Thetis* did not all point in the same direction when closed - the normal arrangement on earlier submarines. The test pipe cock was blocked by fresh paint. Following the *Thetis* disaster, the Royal Navy adopted the American 'free accent' system of submarine escape, and built a tower at *HMS Dolphin* at Gosport for the instruction in this technique. They also recommended the introduction of a standing organization for search and rescue to improve the dismally slow response time to the emergency.

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It does not, seem possible that twenty five years have passed since the big oil tanker *Amoco Cadiz* ran aground on the coast of Brittany. She sailed from the Persian Gulf in the middle of February 1978, carrying 223,000 tons of Iranian crude for the refineries of Rotterdam, at 228,000 deadweight she had almost twice the cargo capacity of the *Torrey Canyon* which went aground 13 miles west of Lands End in 1967.

The *Amoco Cadiz* followed the standard route for ships too big to use the Suez Canal; around the Cape of Good Hope, up through the Canary Islands, and across the Bay of Biscay. As the sun rose on 16th March, she entered the traffic separation scheme off Ushant, on the western tip of Brittany.

Rolling heavily and taking seas on deck in the Force 7 westerly wind, she altered course to starboard to begin heading up the English Channel, then at 9.45 am the ship's steering gear failed. Captain Bardari stopped the engines and hoisted two black balls at the yardarm (a signal meaning 'the ship is not under command'). Although he was now drifting in a gale, in a fully laden ship with the lee shore only 15 miles away, he was not unduly alarmed: steering failures were not that rare and usually could be remedied by changing a fuse or switching to a back-up hydraulic system, and the engineers struggled to make repairs for more than an hour until another pipe fractured - now the steering could not be restored.

At about 11.20am Captain Bardari radioed for a tug. By the time the German tug *Pacific* arrived at 12.20pm, the wind had risen to a full gale and had veered to the northwest, while the tanker had drifted closer to the rocky coast of Brittany.

A hawser, (wire cable) was passed to the stricken vessel and the tug tried to pull her head into the wind which would allow the tanker's engines to be used to drive her away from the coast. But the tug was not powerful enough. It managed to check the tanker's drift for a while, but the towing line parted at 4.15pm. Captain Bardari tried to hold off the coast, now only 9 miles away, by putting his engines astern, but the single screw was hampered by the uselessly flogging rudder, and the wind and tide continued to push the *Amoco Cadiz* towards danger.

A more powerful tug was on its way, but would not be there until midnight. At 7pm the *Pacific* attempted to pass a second cable to the tanker's stern, but to no avail. At 8pm, with his ship less than 2 miles from the rocks, Captain Bardari dropped the port anchor, but still the ship continued to drift. Finally, at 9.04pm the *Amoco Cadiz* grounded on the rocks off Portsall, about 15 miles northeast of Ushant.

The crew was lifted off by helicopter, and that night the *Amoco Cadiz* began to break up. Over the next few weeks, 223,000 tons of crude oil escaped from her tanks, polluting the seas and shorelines of north-western France.

The Liberian Government Inquiry into the *Amoco Cadiz* found that, although the ship appeared to comply with the SOLAS regulations, "events... proved all too clearly that she did not in fact have an effective steering gear". Captain Bardari was also criticized for his delay in calling for a tug.

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The history of seafaring is liberally spiced with tales of mystery and intrigue, from the classic case of the *Marie Celeste* to the unusual story of the steamship *Marlborough* whose mouldy and weed-shrouded hulk was found drifting off Tierra del Fuego in 1913, having disappeared 23 years earlier. On board were scattered bones of her crew but what fate befell them, no one could tell,

## The *Mohegan*, 1898

The little Cornish church of St Keverne sits on a hilltop above Falmouth Bay, its tower a landmark for passing yachts, its churchyard the last resting place of farmers, fishermen and the victims of shipwreck. To the East of the church, less than a mile offshore, jagged fangs of black rock pierce the waves, known *maen eglos* in the Cornish tongue, (Church Rocks). The Manacles, to use their anglicised name, have been the cause of more than 100 shipwrecks, from the *Star Cross* in 1787 to the *Forde* in 1919, and have taken over 1,000 lives.

But the most mysterious of these disasters, and the one that claimed the most lives, was the wreck of the steamship *Mohegan*.

The *Mohegan* was a new luxury liner of 6,889 tons belonging to the Atlantic Transport Company. On the 13th October 1898 she departed Tilbury bound for New York, with only 53 passengers, 97 crew and seven cattlemen to tend the deck cargo of live cattle. She turned south from the Thames, steamed through the English Channel and by the afternoon of the 14th had passed Prawle Point, and was seen by some observers off Plymouth. Dusk merged into a dark and moonless night, but the weather was good and the sea calm. Nevertheless, at some point a terrible mistake was made - instead of following a course of 260 degrees, which would have taken her clear to the south of the Lizard, the *Mohegan* was heading straight towards the Manacles and the unlit coast behind. At around 6.45 pm, people of Porthoustock, the fishing village beneath St Keverne saw the liner's lights and realised she was steaming towards disaster. The coastguard lookout on the cliff-top fired off a warning rocket, but to no effect - the *Mohegan* ran onto the Manacles at 13 knots, striking with such force that the boiler room began to fill immediately: within a few minutes the generators were flooded and all her lights went out. A distress rocket went up from the ship, but the Porthoustock lifeboat had already been launched, soon followed by Cadgwith, Falmouth and Polperro. Meanwhile, the liner was rolling in the light swell, making it difficult to lower the boats, while the total darkness and the lack of lights made it difficult for the lifeboats to find the stricken ship. Fifteen minutes after striking the rocks, she lay over on her port side and went down by the head, leaving only her masts and funnel showing above the waves. Two boats had got clear, and a few survivors climbed into the rigging, but only 43 lives were saved in all,

The death toll of 106 included the Captain and all his officers, so what went wrong will never be known: it can only be assumed that the Captain had ordered the wrong course, or that the helmsman had steered the wrong course. The little church at St Keverne served as a makeshift mortuary while locals performed the grisly task of gathering corpses from the shore. The Captain's body turned up headless 250 miles away in Caernarvon Bay. The bodies were buried in mass graves in the churchyard; the largest beside the wall contained not less than 40 bodies.

LATE EXTRA

Pension Credit for us oldies?

Shipmates over 60, have you applied for your new Pension Credit yet?

You don't know about it! That isn't surprising because the Government is trying to keep this one under wraps, they do not think they'll be able to keep up with the applications if it was generally promulgated. Don't let that put you off, it is your entitlement, and you could see an increase of up to £50 a week on your pension. From October 6th 2003 the Government wants to make sure that everyone over 60 gets a minimum weekly income of £102.10, and at least £155.80 for a couple by means of a Pension Credit. The person applying must be 60 or over, but their partner can be under 60. In addition, those over 65 with extra savings or modest occupational pensions will also get help for the first time. All this will be done by a means test, and these payments will replace the current Minimum Income Guarantee (MIG). To make an application for Pension Credit phone (free-phone number) 0800 991 234 - Open Mon-Fri 8 am-8 pm. Also open on Sat 9 am 1 pm. Make sure you have available your National Insurance number, information of money coming in, and info on savings or investments. The form is filled in by them over the phone, then a 12 page sheaf of forms with your details all made out for you to check will arrive, check it and return Note If you are on MIG already you need to do nothing, it will come automatically. If you are not on MIG, the Government has pledged to write to people aged 60 and over, between April 2003 and June 2004. However, you need not wait, apply now unless you want a back dated payment, but it may not be in the form of a lump sum. The Government is trying to make it easier for themselves by phasing this scheme in over 3 years, but that does not mean you cannot apply now. Do it ASAP. Once your application is in and you qualify even if you die, and your claim was successful your estate and dependants will benefit. Go to your local CAB to check, or phone the number

I have been informed that the Greek medal is at last being issued, if you have not got yours yet it shouldn't be long now in coming.