

HMS Phoebe
Association
Newsletter
February 2006



F42 Being pounded by waves
E-mailed by the Toms family. Do you know them ???

Happy New Year Shipmates and Friends.

We had some sad moments this year but also some good ones, the main one being the Lottery Grant in May. I was glad to see that it helped some shipmates who had never been able to attend a reunion before. It always surprises us how well these reunions turn out, of course there will always be some small isolated complaints.

The Weymouth event did not get by either, although most have praised the hotel and want to return. There were a couple of hiccups, i.e. a mix up in a room allocation and the ballroom bar being shut all over the weekend. I did speak to the event manageress and someone got a severe reprimand, a letter of apology arrived a short time later, we also had a seasonal Greeting card from the hotel.

Talking of which, Lil and I thank all 71 of you who sent us cards, in all we had 144 cards this year, but it does not end there, throughout the year Lil patiently removes all the stamps from letters we receive, (No! we do not reuse them) they are sent to the Dogs for the Blind Association and we get a letter of appreciation, and the cards, when the season is over, are put in the Christmas card recycle box at Tesco's, we think it a good idea if the cards can be put to further charitable use in this way.

Our eleventh Great grandchild was expected to be born about New Year's day, but arrived three days later. Our congratulations to all who became great grandparents, grand parents, mothers & fathers, uncles and aunts in the past year.

Our membership has gone down a bit during the year, but every now and again we get enquiries and some join us. The full membership each time the new list comes out has remained around the 140 mark each year, but you may notice that the associated list has more than doubled since 1996. Newsletters being sent now total 168, a vast increase on the original 22. At present there is no expected increase in subscriptions, we are sailing along quite nicely.

I have had the annual newsletter from the Federation of Naval Associations and in it is a letter from the HMS Impregnable Association who have had a nasty experience regarding their Vice Chairman, Secretary/Treasurer, &, the Accounts. (Treasurer is wife of the Vice Chairman)

The following is an abbreviated version of the letter headed "Wealth by Stealth":

Suspecting that certain items did not add up, a request was made by the

Chairman and Committee to view the account books and ledgers. This was refused time and time again which lead to a vote of 'no confidence' in the Secretary/Treasurer and demanding her resignation. One would think the Vice Chairman would co-operate and have his wife make the books available, but he also bluntly refused and seemed to be 'hand in glove' with the Treasurer. He was dismissed and expelled from the association.

The bank account was frozen to remove all temptation and control from the abhorrent pair to us. If the books were in order why refuse a request for the books to be inspected. Upon being dismissed their seemingly dishonesty was compounded by the retention of association slops, ie - Blazer and Lapel Badges, Ties, the official Association Banner, Accounts books, ledgers, official letters, and members personal details. The ex Vice Chairman has now formed a new association under the name of HMS Impregnable/Drake, with him as the self elected Chairman and his wife the Treasurer. Be aware of what you maybe letting your-self in for if you join this association. Peter Ross. Chairman/Founder of The HMS Impregnable Association.

NB; The letter does not state what, or if, there were any discrepancies in the account books, but the implication is there. I would like to point out that our accountancy books can be requested for viewing at any time, (subject to committee approval), and are always available at the AGM.

Each year the Federation holds an AGM/Reunion & Social weekend at Mill Rythe, Hayling Island. Our association is a member of the Federation, which entitles us to attend. The event is half board, with coach trips to Portsmouth. The bar this year is half price, (other years it has been 1p per pint or tot).

Entertainment is very good and of the highest calibre. This year the cost is £95 pp, a deposit of £20 pp is required. We have been to Mill Rythe a few times with the RNA, and found it one of the best camps we have visited. Accommodation is in chalets or flats, each have TV and tea/coffee making facilities, and all are en-suite. Car parking is in front of the main building, but you can drive to your chalet/flat to unload/load. There is an indoor pool and separate disco/bar. The food has always been very good, if it is the same as when the RNA visit, as well as the set course you can also obtain Salads, Omelettes, Crepes from 3 separate bars within the dining room. Breakfast is the full English type but you can also choose what you want. If you prefer not to climb stairs or walk far state this in the provided section of the application form. I have just one application form, if anyone would like a form please phone me ASAP, and I will send you one. The dates of the event are from Friday 10th March to Monday 13th March. **This event is well attended.**

Mrs Jean Taylor and Partner Richard from the HMS Phoebe Chapter in Florida, USA will be attending the reunion, unfortunately the other lady from the chapter is now unable to attend. We also expect to hear that S/m Eric and Vera Carman will be coming over from Canada again.

After a long spell of silence from S/m Albert Hoyle we have at last heard from him. Unfortunately Albert had a car accident and wrote his car off, then he spent some time in hospital having heart surgery and now has to rest for a few weeks. But Albert has now got another car and assures me that he will be at Scarborough. Albert is one of our founder members and has been to every reunion.

Did you see the bit in the newspapers about the Stoker who did not want to go to sea and did a runner, he ended up with 90 days, what happened to the cuts that used to go with it, followed by SNLR ??

I went to Curry's for their sales and acquired a new Multi Function Printer made by Brother, its proper price was supposed to be over £100, but was being offered at £49.99. I set it up and found that it also translated into English documents written in various languages and vice versa. We have a German friend who writes to us, it was always a job to find someone to translate his letter, now it could be easier once I get the hang of doing it on this machine.

S/Ms Doug Harris, Alf Larkin, Dave & Jayne Gutowska, and Daphne Roper will not be attending the reunion this year. Doug and Alf will be attending a wedding abroad. Some will breathe a sigh of relief that Doug will not be there to wheedle money from you at his auction.

I have to order the coaches this month, so please can you let me know if you will be using them, it will be one to York on the Saturday enabling you to spend about five hours there sightseeing etc, and on Sunday will be the all day trip round Heartbeat country with a stop for lunch.

At the moment it looks like we will have to charge £2 pp to cover the extra hire charges. But I promise it will not be any higher than this. Could I make this appeal again, when you phone me and the answer phone comes on, could you please, please speak slowly and clearly, a slight pause between words would be most helpful. We had 21 recorded messages on our phone when we came back from our two week respite, but only six of them were plain enough to understand. If you have ever tried to understand what is being said over the supermarket Tannoy system, it all seems jumbled up, you know what I mean!

Veterans Lapel Badges

You can now obtain the badge if you were serving up to and including 1st December 1954. I sent for mine and got it five days later. If you require a application form please phone me. I cannot apply for you, the form has to be signed by you. (Being active in a war zone is now not required, the wording of the form has been changed) Sec.

We often read or hear about dangerous chemicals being dumped at sea and the devastating effect they would have, the following are equally as dangerous or more so, but we have not heard about them

Nerve Gas was sunk by the US, encased in concrete, in the Gulf of Mexico. The British sunk 40,000 tons of Germany's mustard, phosgene and tabun gases in the Baltic during 1946 and 1947. They sunk some 34 ships, filled with gas and conventional ammunition totaling 152,000 tons, in the Skagerrak at a depth of 650 meters. A large amount was also dumped about 15 miles Northeast of the Island of Bornholm. East German Stasi (Security Police) archive records reveal massive amounts of toxic gasses dumped into the Baltic around Gotland and Bornholm and in the Little Belt area near the Island of Aeroc. According to Danish records the Soviet Union dumped 50,000 tons of gas ammunition off Gotland and Bornholm after WW2. It is also alleged 170,000 metric tons of nerve gas grenades are rusting away on the ocean floor off Arendal, Norway in the rusting hulls of 40 vessels. These wrecks are believed to contain German bombs and grenades of mustard gas, tabun, Sarin, forgen and lewisite. It is believed the last check on these Baltic wrecks was in 1989. British dumping sites are also in the Irish and North Seas, which were not encased. 24 vessels were scuttled during Operation Sandcastle in deep water off the Hebrides and off Lands End. These 24 vessels had been loaded with 120,000 tons of mustard gas from the British Army and 17,000 tons of the German nerve gas Tabun. Other vessels were used to simply jettison munitions in various places and even nuclear material. This continued up till 1976. The Beaufort Dyke is a trench between Scotland and Ireland and about 30 miles in length, This trench is now the home to 1.17 million tonnes of munitions and about 2 tons of radioactive material. British authorities have denied ever dumping the nerve gas Sarin. Fishermen bring up the odd shell from these areas. During 1945 and 1946 the Americans dumped phosgene and mustard gas encased in concrete coffins into the Adriatic Sea. After WW2 4,900 tons of mustard and phosgene gasses were dumped in Japanese coastal waters and inland lakes. The Chinese found 18 Japanese dump sites off Mongolia, and it is believed vessels have been scuttled in the Mediterranean, Red Sea, and the Arctic. There were rules dumping had to be 10 n/miles offshore and 3,000 ft deep. These rules were not followed in several cases. The question here is: WHAT IF ?????

We have read about "Operation Pedestal" in the past, but I came across this story by a man who was actually one of the crew on SS Ohio for a short time!

"Operation Pedestal - SS Ohio.

By Ray Morton

I had turned 18 in June 1942 while on a trip home from Mellila, Morocco via Gibraltar after discharging a cargo of coke and bringing home iron ore in a battered old 'rust bucket' named *Camarata*.. Shipping on Tyneside was pretty quiet so the Merchant Navy Pool sent me to Glasgow to join an oil tanker named *Ohio*, or as the crew called it "Oh aitch 10". Nobody seemed to know anything about her but I soon found out. *Ohio* had arrived in the Clyde in June 1942 and was 'requisitioned' by the British Ministry of War Transport.

She was luxury compared to the other ships I had sailed in.

Two berth cabins and food we had only dreamed about. She had been provisioned in the USA, there was Grapefruit in the cold rooms and a dozen different varieties of cereals for breakfast followed by bacon and eggs! A whole variety of fish, meat and ice-cream! Once in warmer weather iced coffee was the order of the day. So much for creature comforts. I was making my first trip as an Assistant Steward after six months as a 'Deck Boy' then twelve months as a 'Cabin Boy'. Rumours were rife as to where we were going but we all knew such comforts would carry a price tag!

Shortly before sailing, Captain Mason gave us all the "good news" and said anyone who wished to leave could go ashore, but, full credit to the boys, no one did. Then it was off to sea. Being a 'gung ho' 18 year old I wasn't going to miss the biggest game of cowboys and Indians ever played, and with the biggest and strongest escort ever waiting for us offshore, what was there to be scared of? Britannia Rules the Waves!

A few things stick in my mind to this day and always will. Like the escorts, seeing those bloody great 16 inch gun battleships and the aircraft-carriers, to say nothing of the cruisers and all those destroyers made me feel ten foot tall. But sailing under a hot sun in the Mediterranean on August 11th constipation was cured. Sitting on a bollard on the after deck having a smoke and iced coffee after lunch and talking to 'Galley Boy' Mario Guidotti, a fifteen year old from Glasgow on his first trip. We were watching the aircraft-carrier *HMS Eagle* on the starboard quarter of the convoy. We saw four huge water spouts erupt along her port side. It was exactly 1.15p.m. She started listing to

port and for the next seven minutes we watched man and aircraft slide off her decks as the list got worse and by 1.22 p.m. she had disappeared! Phew!!

As the holder of the AA gunners ticket my action station was on a machine gun on the boat deck. The severity and continuity of the air attacks that followed was ferocious, you just stayed at action stations, you did not have time for anything and you did not sleep. Wherever you pointed the gun there was an enemy plane and you just kept the trigger pressed until you had to reload. The sky was like a huge lace curtain with shell bursts form close to a hundred ships and it just stayed that way. Bombs were raining down and planes were falling out of the sky, ships disappeared in a flash of blue light. Many of the ships were carrying aviation fuel in drums between decks, and how that reacted to a torpedo or bomb I leave to the reader's imagination, and near misses were two a penny.

At one stage HMS *Nelson* and *Rodney* were being attacked by torpedo bombers flying very low. Each battleship turned to steam right at the planes, the three elevated 16" guns on their A turrets let loose a salvo, when the smoke cleared not one of the attacking torpedo bombers was left. Some time later a RN Gunnery Officer told me that a blast from each 16" shell would clear a square mile of sky. The pilots would never know what hit them!

On the 12th August around 6.00p.m., while I was trying to shoot down aircraft, a torpedo struck Ohio in the summer tanks loaded with kerosene. With a 24ft x 27ft gash in her side, tank tops flying off, flames shooting mast high, a fountain of kerosene soaked me at my gun post on the boat deck. What happened next I don't know, but when reality hit I was in the 'oggin' bobbing up and down in my life jacket complete with red light and whistle. I can't swim, and watching ships steam past without even a wave did not do anything for my morale and I felt a bit bitter. But there were three others in the water close by, one of them was Mario, the galley boy. By this time the convoy was disappearing in the distance, but we weren't alone! Enemy planes flew over and used us for target practice, fortunately their bullets missed.

After about three hours of bobbing about in the drink, a destroyer came into sight and headed for us. After picking up the other three she headed for me. It was HMS *Bicester* a Hunt class destroyer. Heaving lines were thrown at me, all dropped short, until my dull brain told me I was supposed to strike out and grab one. I yelled out I could not swim to grab one, a three badge seaman pushed his cap back scratched his head and said in a West Country accent, "Well I'll be B.....d, I've heard it all now" The destroyers stern was swinging closer to me. A Petty Officer ripped off his uniform and dived in and grabbed me, just as the turning screw were beginning to pull me under. He got me to the

ship's side and up a scrambling net, where a burly AB put an arm round me and said " Come on son, you're ok now". I pushed him aside and said I knew I was ok, then promptly collapsed on the deck. I came round as the ships medic was attending me, he gave me neat rum to drink then I passed out. I came to the next morning demanding to know why they had knocked me out. The medic said I had been in no condition to know what had been happening, but I remembered hearing stretcher parties being called for as I scrambled aboard. *Bicester* had been under attack all the time while picking us up, and some machine gun bullets had caused casualties in the open gun positions.

I was put ashore in Gibraltar then sailed back to England on the SS Lanstephen Castle. On arrival back in UK, I learned two things about being a Merchant Navy survivor. One your pay stopped the day you landed in the drink, and two, if you spent four weeks getting home, or in a life raft or boat, *that was your survivors leave.*

The Rivelyn Hotel will be open again from the 27th February, in the mean time continue to send your reservations forms, a receipt will be forthcoming when the hotel reopens. At the moment some one will be there to answer the phone between 9am and 1pm daily. If you have mislaid your form phone me for another one.

Pension credits:

These will be increased from the 10th April by £3.30

Trafalgar 200 Woods:

We were supposed to be informed of when the opening ceremony for the start of the Phoebe Wood site at Abingdon was to commence. Apparently trees are being planted and work on the site should be completed sometime next year. However, I had a short phone call from the site-planning manager this week; the information now is the site will be inaugurated next June.

A commissioning ceremony will be held to which the Association and TS Phoebe will be invited to attend. At the moment! I understand the ceremony will take place on a Friday, if, as was proposed the last time I met with the organiser, the ceremony will run into the evening when a firework display will be the closing event.

There is a restaurant at the venue, I am hoping that food will be laid on,

if not perhaps we can negotiate for a meal for shipmates and cadets. I believe the local Sea Cadet band will be asked to play. I am not sure what the local hotel situation is, but if rooms are required I will certainly look into it.

Does anyone have a preference of where to hold the 2007 reunion, bearing in mind that it would be in the southern area? Has anyone been to a hotel that they liked and thought a reunion there would be a good idea. We want one that has at least 60/70 rooms and a dance floor. Travelling by train is expensive, there is no way we can get over that, but there are some concessions to be had, and coach fares are cheaper, although journeys do take longer. Most want a seaside location, so we are looking at Kent, Sussex, Dorset, maybe Torquay. Wherever it will be it will still be a long journey for some. All suggestions will be put before the committee whose decision is final.