

HMS Phoebe Association

*Newsletter
April 2009*



S/m Danny Owen RM

We begin with news about the reunion, the last time I was in touch with Jason the Hotel Manager, there were 57 rooms reserved, considering just 7 of these are single rooms we are not doing too bad. All the single rooms have been allocated, anyone booking a single room from 1st March will have to have a twin room, and pay a surcharge of £10. The train station is not too far from the hotel, a taxi shouldn't cost too much, but there are also 3 bus services, 12, 12a, 90, that leave the station and stop at the Pier which is opposite the hotel, get off the bus at the Pier/Queens Hotel bus stop, walk back a few yards and turn right, the hotel is up on the left, altogether about 50 yds from bus stop.

We have searched for a coach company that does not make too much of an inroad into our funds, and have successfully hired one for the Saturday. It will leave the hotel at about 0915 and proceed to Battle, where you will have an hour and a half to walk round the town etc, I have no idea what is at Battle, but there must be something interesting there to see? The coach will then proceed to Hastings, there are some interesting things to do and see in Hastings, may I suggest you get one of the Hastings pamphlets from the hotel to see what there is. The driver will tell you what time to be at the pick up point, he has instructions to get you back to the hotel before 1800. Dress for dinner is optional, but we do ask you to wear jackets please.

Sunday. There may be prayers in one of the lounges before breakfast, (to be confirmed). After breakfast there will be the AGM, (Jacket and tie. Medals optional) we hope this will not take too long. Any shipmate wishing to put them selves forward for election to the committee, please inform the Chairman S/m Ian Gough or Secretary Roy Pavely on Friday.

I have arranged for you to visit the RN Old Comrades Club. The club opens at 1200 on a Sunday, it is situated in Beach Road, about 15 min walk from the hotel, up the sea front. (Walk left from the Pier). A buffet has been arranged, there may be a "Up Spirits" ceremony.

The club is well frequented by all the ships associations that hold reunions in Eastbourne. Dress as for AGM

I will require, **ASAP**, all the names of people attending the RNOC Club, for the catering officer.. I will also need your names for the Coach, it is only a 49 seat coach, and will be on a first come first served basis. the best thing to do is to **PHONE ME NOW 01235 211501**. **Leave your name** if the answer machine is on, speak slowly and clearly.

(We're both a bit Mutt & Jeff).

Please note:- **Hotel Parking info on Page 4**

Obituary.

I am sure that a lot of you will remember meeting in past reunions “little” Danny Owen. RM. I very much regret to inform you that Danny passed away on February 2nd 2009, after a short illness. His funeral was on February 12th at the Medway Crematorium. Lil and I were unable to attend, but S/m Jim Hutchinson kindly agreed to represent the Association, Jim also stood before the coffin and sounded the ‘still’ on his Bosun’s Call as the curtain closed, followed by the ‘carry-on’ a minute later. There were around 40 mourners in attendance, a very good turn out considering Danny and wife Dot did not have any relations living in the UK.

Our sympathy and condolence go to Dot at this bad time along with our best wishes. A donation from the Association was made to the RNLI.

I remember Danny at our first Hotel reunion in Bournemouth. He had booked in for two nights, finding we were staying for three nights he had to find another hotel for the Sunday night. Danny came aboard Phoebe in 1949 as a Boy Marine Bugler. When he attained the age of 18 he applied to become a RM Commando, everyone laughed because Danny was so short, he told me he was just under 5ft then, naturally he was turned down, but Danny pestered his CO with requests to become a commando, in the end they relented with the thought that letting him try, and easily failing the extremely hard course, they would not hear anything more of him. But Danny proved fully capable of completing the grueling course, and amazed every one by coming top of the class, he was very proud of his green beret, I think he only took it off to have a shower? I liked Danny very much, he often phoned me, even when he stopped coming to reunions he still kept in touch.

Have a smooth journey Danny. You are sorely missed. Roy & Lil.

I regret to inform you that S/m Peter Potts has crossed the bar. Peter aged 83 passed away on February 21 rd after contracting Bronchial Pneumonia. The funeral took place at East Hampstead Crematorium, a donation was made to the Alzheimers group.

(Peter had left the association because of illness, but decided he would like to rejoin as he became better, his name and details would have been in this newsletter as a rejoined member)?

Roy.

New Member

238	HILL Maxwell	3 St Johns Rd Nottingham NG12 2GW	0115 333590	AB	Sonar	1943/46
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Associated Member:

238A HILL Michael Son of No 238.

A much belated thank you to everyone who sent us Christmas, New Year, and Get Well cards. They were greatly appreciated. LIL & Roy.

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A few years ago I was interested in a US Naval association, namely the US Cruiser Sailors Association, they sent me a very large newsletter which was a very interesting thing to read. I think it was the extras I had to pay at that time that stopped me from joining. I was offered another chance in February this year to join the Association, this time my daughter Sharon asked her step-daughter in Las Vegas to pay the joining fee, mainly to save me the trouble of forking out bank commissions etc. Because the cost of sending the newsletter to the UK was a lot, the fee was \$35, I am now an official member of the USCSA. The newsletter I received is of course all about American sailors etc, but there are many ex RN also in the Ass'n and I expect sometime there will be articles from them. If I remember it? I will bring the newsletter (2 Now) along to the reunion, it will be on the table for all who are interested to read, also the FNA newsletters. Roy.

From the Afton Hotel Ref Car Parking.

Guests are definitely NOT allowed to park on yellow lines with the hotel permit, nor are they allowed to park on the coach bay. They can park on the coach bay on Sunday ONLY.

Parking restrictions are in force 7 days per week and I would advise guests not to park on the yellow lines on a Sunday also. They must only park in areas marked Zone S. They can park on the seafront with 50p hotel vouchers from 4 pm until 10am the next day. In between these times the seafront is pay & display ONLY.

NOTE

S/m Bill Main has changed his telephone No, its now: 01592 581676.

I stand corrected by S/m Jim Hutchison for a article in the Feb Newsletter Jim writes:-

With Ref to the *BRITAGNE*, no mention of *HMS Resolution* was mentioned when we attacked the French Fleet, the *Bretagne* was the given target for *Resolution*. It was she who fired on, and sank the *Britagne*. I was part of the twin 4" AA guns crew on the boat deck facing the French Fleet. I was closed up on the gun during the action, and able to get a full view of the firing of our 15" guns. I actually saw the *Bretagne* being hit with our 15" shells, and saw her blow up, it was an amazing sight, but sad to know what we were doing.

I can remember *HMS Hood* chasing the *Strasbourg*, but being a modern ship the *Hood* could not keep up match her speed. The French battleship *Richelieu* was at Dakar, *HMS Resolution* was sent to attack her, but on September 25th *HMS Resolution* was torpedoed by the Vichy French submarine *Benaures* and was so badly damaged, she had to be towed to Free-town by *HMS Barham*. I was interviewed and filmed about this episode.

(I reckon Jim should get a job checking Naval History).

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I have been looking through our records and I believe our oldest member is an Associated member, Mrs Doris Vye of Enfield. The last time we heard from Doris was some years ago when she sent some more of her articles for our newsletter. Doris, who lives alone, was 97 on 25th Feb 09. Best regards to you Doris and take care.

If any other member is older than 97, Please let me know.

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Lil and I went to the Federation of Naval Associations Reunion and AGM at a Holiday Camp near Weston Super Mare, it was in a place named Sand Bay, a desolate place, but the camp was quite nice with clean and comfortable chalets, food was excellent and so was the service, if you wanted a bit extra there was a help yourself food bar. There was one fault and that was the coach parties, the camp caters for them, seating at the evening entertainment was soon taken up by the coach parties, but once the bingo was finished a lot of them left. The entertainment was very good although the

comedian told a few jokes that shipmates had sent to me by email, I wondered if they had sent them to him as well. We were amazed at how much Weston had grown, there were large retail parks every where, the town is still its dowdy self, a lot of shops closed, and as the comedian said, 'all charity shops and estate agents'. There was a 60p a drink on Saturday night, we all thought it was for just one drink, but found out that if you took your glass back you got another for 60p. We met up with a couple we got to know last year, and spent most of the week end with them.

Our Association is a member of the Federation and this entitles any of you to go to its functions, I can honestly say that the three we have been to have all been excellent, there are free coach trips on Saturday and Sunday, on Sunday it is usually to a RN Club, where 'Up Spirits' is laid on and a free buffet, Saturday is usually to somewhere of interest or a market etc. The AGM lasts about 40 minutes followed by the raffle, there is a church service on Sunday morning, and that is very well attended. Next year the Federation is hoping to hold the reunion in Holland, they are in touch with a Dutch Naval Association who have made the invitation, at the moment they are getting the travel arrangements sorted and the accommodation.

Travel will probably be by coach, with pick ups in large towns, I should imagine that there will be a bit extra to pay for this jaunt. Its quite a nice place to travel to by car, a quick trip over on a ferry and a drive through Belgium then into Holland, the roads are good, or were when I was delivering over there, nigh on all Dutch people speak good English, and you can get British Fish & Chips, (just make sure you say no to the mayonnaise 'cos they lash it on'). This last reunion cost £85 pp which is very reasonable. As soon as I get any more information I will put it in a newsletter.

Pirates caught red-handed by one of Her Majesty's warships after trying to hijack a cargo ship off Somalia made the grave mistake of opening fire on two Royal Navy assault craft packed with commandos armed with machineguns and SA80 rifles. In the ensuing gunfight, two Somali pirates in a Yemeni-registered fishing dhow were killed, and a third pirate, believed to be a Yemeni, suffered injuries and subsequently died. By the time the Royal Marines boarded the pirates' vessel, the enemy had lost the will to fight and surrendered quietly. It was the first time in living memory that the Royal Navy had

been engaged in a fatal shoot-out on the high seas. The Royal Navy described the boarding as “compliant”.

The dramatic confrontation took place 60 miles south of the Yemeni coast and involved the Royal Navy Type 22 frigate, HMS Cumberland, which was on anti-piracy patrol as part of a Nato maritime force, the Royal Marine unit on board, were on short-notice standby to engage in “non-compliant boardings”. The detected the dhow was towing a skiff, and identified as a vessel which had been involved in an attack on the Danish-registered MV Powerful earlier. The pirates had opened fire on the cargo boat with assault rifles. Under rules of engagement, which allows the Royal Navy to intervene when pirates are positively identified, the commandos were dispatched from the frigate in rigid-raider craft and sped towards the pirates’ dhow. The Ministry of Defence said the Marines circled the pirates’ boat to try and persuade them to stop. As they approached, however, several of the pirates, a mixed crew of Somalis and Yemenis, swung their assault rifles in their direction and opened fire. The Royal Marines returned fire “in self defence”, and then boarded the dhow - a stolen Yemeni-registered fishing vessel. The commandos found guns and other “paraphernalia” on board the dhow and a handful of terrified pirates. The MoD said it was unclear whether the Yemeni who died had been shot by the Marines or was wounded from a previous incident involving the pirates. The gun battle was in stark contrast to the Royal Navy’s last encounter with a boatful of armed men - when crew members of HMS Cornwall, also a Type 22 frigate, were surrounded by heavily armed Iranian Revolutionary Guards in March last year. The Commons Defence Committee described the incident as “a national embarrassment”. This battle signalled a new policy of maximum robustness for the Royal Navy on the high seas. Captain Mike Davis-Marks, a senior spokesman for the Navy, said: “This is bound to have an impact on pirates who for the last two years have been getting away with seizing vessels and receiving large ransoms. Now suddenly there’s the threat of death and this may force them to think again, but they are determined people, so we’ll have to see.” *(The Russians claimed a helicopter based on their own frigate Neustrashimy had also taken part in yesterday’s battle, though the Royal Navy knew nothing about it. The Royal Marine commandoes were supported by a Lynx helicopter from HMS Cumberland, so the MoD said).*

Price of heroism: The rise and fall of a VC hero

When John Bythesea, then a young lieutenant, and a ship's stoker, William Johnstone, rowed ashore at the island of Vardo, off Finland, the Crimean War was in something of a stalemate.

Despite the Royal Navy's massive array of firepower gathered in the Baltic, the British commander, Sir Charles Napier, and his French counterpart were under pressure. They had appeared reluctant to deploy their vast fleets against Russia's coastal fortifications and had prompted anger among MPs for turning their guns on undefended Finnish villages instead.

It was the summer of 1854, a few months into the conflict, and Sir Charles was looking for a victory in what was threatening to be a forgotten theatre, overshadowed by the exploits on land. Sir Charles, a veteran of the Napoleonic Wars, turned his attentions to the Russian fortress at Bomarsund - an aggressive symbol of the Tsar's expansionist plans and an obvious target for Britain's naval might.

An earlier bombardment had failed to destroy the outpost, although the bravery of one ship's mate, throwing a live shell overboard, had earned the award of the first Victoria Cross. Few could guess that the second and third VC s were to be earned in the second wave of hostilities, not aboard the blockading ships with their awesome technologically advanced arsenal, but miles away on Vardo, by two men, a single pistol and a rope.

It was the second day of the bombardment when Bythesea, the son of a Somerset vicar, left his ship, the 46-gun screw frigate *HMS Arrogant*. The British command had learnt that secret messages were being sent from the Tsar via Vardo to Bomarsund on the neighbouring island, part of the Aland group off south-west Finland. The volunteers' mission was to intercept the mail.

After befriending a local farmer, the men spent three days in hiding before they spotted their first Russians - five of them coming ashore - and, sure enough, they were carrying postbags. Descriptions of the ensuing action are surprisingly short on hyperbole. According to one account: "Johnstone ambushed the men, at Bythesea's signal, attempting to throw a rope around the group whilst Bythesea provided cover with just one pistol." Two Russians dropped their bags and ran, while the remaining three surrendered. Bythesea ordered the men back to their boat and made them row him back to the *Arrogant* with the intercepted communications.

Bomarsund was taken four days later with the loss of 53 defenders and several British sailors, including Lieutenant the Honourable Cameron Wrottesley, whose grave is on the island of Fjalskar. The British destroyed the fort the following month, although the name travelled to the north-east pit village of Bedlington in England, where it was given to a new coal mine and the village that grew up around it.

The VC was presented in 1857 at a Hyde Park ceremony, by Queen Victoria. By then the conflict in the Crimea was over.

(Bythesea's medal was only the second one to be awarded by Queen Victoria and was sold for £155,350 at an auction).

Despite his youthful heroism, Bythesea's career was to end in failure. After the war he was promoted to captain of the paddle gun-vessel *HMS Locust*, rising to the rank of commander in 1856. He saw action in the second outbreak of the Opium Wars with China and later served on a commission examining the defence of Canada. After another commission, off west Africa, he was invalided out, serving in Washington before returning to sea as captain of the *HMS Phoebe*. But trouble and humiliation were to strike when he commissioned the battleship *Lord Clyde*, on what was to be hers and his final mission.

Lying at Syracuse, he received a wire from the British command at Malta ordering him to assist a stricken British steamer that had run aground at Pantellaria. But far from rescuing her, the *Clyde* was to suffer the same fate. As captain and crew battled to refloat her, jettisoning tons of coal, munitions and stores in the process, she was badly damaged in a swell and forced to seek help. A message was eventually forwarded aboard a passing steamer, which was received some days later by the *Clyde's* sister ship, the *Lord Warden*. Bythesea's rudderless command swayed violently when under tow, at times threatening to capsize her rescuer. She was eventually towed into Malta.

At his court martial in April 1872, Bythesea and his navigator were severely reprimanded and dismissed from their ship. Neither were ever employed at sea again. He died in 1906 at his home in London. His old shipmate William Johnstone died in 1857 and was buried at sea in St Vincent Passage, the West Indies.

HMS Lord Clyde was returned to England and left to rot, she was eventually sold for £3,500 for breaking her good timbers and fittings salvaged.

I was waiting for someone to send in something to write about, but you will have to contend with a much abbreviated article, an episode from my book, "Yer Tiz" Many years ago I was hiring myself out as a driver, my license covered everything from mopeds to artics. This is about me and a Transit truck.

The job, transport a £50,000 computerised machine to the Munich Computer Show, pick up and return to Pangbourne, Berk's, the trip to last 12 days. The computer was loaded, roped and sheeted by noon on the Friday, and I set out, I had £100 which was for fuel etc, I would have to change this into Francs and Marks. The calamities started on the M25 with a long hold-up, handing in my papers at Ramsgate ferry customs found a mistake on my paperwork that had to be sorted. By the time I got to the Sally ferry reception I was too late and had to wait for the morning ferry. I eventually sailed off at 8 am. I wanted to travel via Luxembourg, to avoid the tolls, but I had to travel on the southern route to the border at Strasbourg. Tolls were a pain I had to get out and walk round the truck to pay. I was dreading French customs at Strasbourg, I knew them to be strict on goods movement at weekends. It was Sunday morning about 2 am when I went to the customs office with my papers and waited at a window for the man to grab my papers and scan through them, then he held his hand out and rubbed finger and thumb together, I knew this meant he wanted a bribe so I passed over 100 francs but he wanted more until I had given him 500 then he stamped my papers, just then a Customs Officer came up to him, which made him jump up only to be slapped across the face by the officer who began shouting at him, a man standing behind me reached past me grabbed my money and my papers thrust them into my hand and told me to run, I did and raced the truck across the bridge to the German side where guards directed me to by pass the customs and drive off. into Germany. It was snowing at Bade-Baden then it rained, as I turned onto the autobahn for Munich it began to snow as well, at 10 am my windscreen got broken as a Porsche sped by. Luckily I was coming to a junction for a industrial area at Karlsruhe, I drove into the estate and parked with my cab under a canopy, I was freezing and worried what I should do when a small car pulled alongside and a young man got out, he spoke good English, asking if I needed help, showing him the broken screen he told me to follow his car and he would get it repaired, I was a bit wary, but followed him to a big Country & Western Bar, where the owner met us, I learned that the owner, Peter, also ran the German Truck shows, while I had a coke and a huge sausage roll he phoned a company to get the screen fixed, and when that was done because my credit card could not be used Peter paid the bill and I gave him a promissory note. It was uneventful then all the way to Munich although the snow was coming down thick. As I drove into Munich at about 4 am I saw what looked like a line of orange bollards across the road, but it turned out to be a row of German prisoners sweeping the snow aside, they parted to let me through. I found the Show and drove in, I was shown a map of where I was to unload, it looked like it was just up to my left, so I turned left and drove up the road, suddenly I was confronted by two huge truck side by side coming straight at me, I had turned into a one way road. When I loaded to return I was told that the computer had been sold and I was to deliver it to a place near Zurich, I didn't mind as long as the customs papers were adjusted. I had very little money now enough for petrol and enough for a roll and a pot of soup, but knowing that once I was on the ferry I could gorge myself as food was included on my ticket. I did not make much of a profit on that trip but now I look back it was mkkkkk both fun and worrying. Roy..

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The gun battle was in stark contrast to the Royal Navy’s last encounter with a boatful of armed men - when crew members of HMS Cornwall, also a Type 22 frigate, patrolling in the Gulf in rigid raiders, were surrounded by heavily armed Iranian Revolutionary Guards in March last year. Eight sailors, including a woman, Leading Seaman Faye Turney, and seven Marines were taken hostage without a shot being fired, and detained for 13 days. The Commons Defence Committee described the incident as “a national embarrassment”. This battle signalled a new policy of maximum robustness for the Royal Navy on the high seas. Captain Mike Davis-Marks, a senior spokesman for the Navy, said: “This is bound

The Daughters Of The British Empire.

Founded in 1909 by a woman. For nearly one hundred years, The Daughters of the British Empire in the U.S.A. has been a common bond for women of British heritage living in America. Members, joining together in fellowship, contribute significantly to the good of their local communities and support the four retirement homes for men and women established by the DBE. The DBE is a charitable, non-profit, non-political, non-sectarian, voluntary American society of women of British or Commonwealth birth or ancestry. Its members are professionals, businesswomen and homemakers with common interests and heritage, who meet regularly for business and social events with the common cause of philanthropy. The society was founded in the United States on March 15, 1909, as the Imperial Order, Daughters of the Empire in the U.S.A., and became the National Society, Daughters of the British Empire in the U.S.A. in 1920. The National Society is incorporated in the state of Delaware. The Society is affiliated with the Imperial Order, Daughters of the Empire in Canada (I.O.D.E.); the Victoria League, London England; and the General Federation of Women's Clubs in the United States.

The Honorary President of the DBE is the wife of the British Ambassador to the U.S. or the Ambassador himself.



**The HMS Phoebe Chapter
Celebrate the 100th anniversary of the DBES**