

*HMS Phoebe
Association
Newsletter*

October 2005



Shipmate
Stanley Evans
1922 - 2005

WELFARE

The photo on the front cover is in memory of S/m Stan Evans. I very much regret to inform you that Stan passed away suddenly on Monday 15th August, the funeral service was held at the Perry Barr Crematorium on Thursday 25th August at 1315. In attendance was Mrs Peggy Mason, myself and Lilian. As well as being a founder member of our association, Stan was also a member of the HMS Ganges Association, RBL, RNA, The Nautical Club (Birmingham), Coastal Forces Association and the Gunner Association. There were four Standards paraded, RNA Birmingham Central, Nautical Club, Coastal Forces and the Gunnery Association. The chapel was full of friends and relations. After the service refreshments were laid on at the Nautical Club.

S/m George White continues to improve; further treatment is continued from today 5th Sept when George will be in hospital for an operation. Wed 14th Sept: - Unfortunately after the op' an infection was suspected in the wound, this is being analyzed. George will be hospitalised until it is cleared up. It may mean the White family will not be able to attend the TS Phoebe Trafalgar Dinner in Bournemouth.

S/m Roy Addison emailed me yesterday to say his radiotherapy treatment is now finished, he is at home enjoying his change in circumstances but feel a bit tired, further treatment will be required in three and six months time which we hope will see Roy start to enjoy life again. Roy and Moreen hope to be at the TS Phoebe Trafalgar Dinner in Bournemouth on 15th Oct.

There are still places vacant for the dinner, phone S/m Ernie Clewes for reservations. There is also the cadets RN inspection on Friday 14th Oct that we are invited to attend when they carry out drills, and perform different evolutions, usually a very good evenings entertainment, of course the Wardroom Bar will be open afterwards for Liquid and solid refreshments

Fleece Jackets:

We are very sorry but 8 of you have not received your jackets yet. It is our fault for mislaying the list of names; if you have one on order can I ask you to phone us at this number (*deleted*)

We will be available at this number from the 3rd October until 3rd November. We will have the jackets with us, and send them from where we are. The phone has an answering service.

E-Mails can be sent c/o my daughter at - ****@aol.com Correspondence:
(*deleted*) Roy.

Lil and I visited the Rivelyn Hotel in Scarborough while we were on a weeks break in Middlesbrough; the arrangements for our 10th reunion are now in hand.

Unfortunately the coach office was closed for their holidays, but I have since phoned them to check on costs of hiring; we have temporarily hired two coaches, one for Saturday to York for the day, and the other one on Sunday for a tour of "Heartbeat" country with probably a stop for lunch at a pub?? Liquid or otherwise.

The coaches seat 49 only, so I expect they will fill quite quickly. The cost of coach hire has, as you may guess, been increased from last year, but we think we will be able to absorb most of it. More about that in a later newsletter. Hotel entertainment will be for three nights. Don't forget the raffles, we have never had to ask for prizes to be donated, you usually inundate us with them, for which we cannot thank you enough, but I have been asked by the raffle ladies if you can cut back on the bottles of wine, else they may have to give two bottles to a winner. Later on I will send you all a copy of where the hotel is situated. (I have been to the hotel 4 times, and I still took a wrong turning).

A hotel reservation form is enclosed, there are 60 rooms, i.e. 4 Triple, - 16 Double - 22 Twin & 18 single. Of those, 1 Triple, 3 Double and 5 Twin rooms are on the ground floor. A deposit of £20 per person is required when making your reservation. There is a specially adapted room in the basement for a wheelchair occupant, with access to the lift and the pavement, this room we would suggest maybe better suited for S/m Roy Fisher. When you have booked in would you be kind enough to let me know, we can then keep a check on the numbers just in case the hotel becomes full and we have to resort to their other hotel for extra rooms. (Just a couple of hundred yards away).

Reunion Weekend street parking tickets from reception - 15p. each

We have been quite concerned about any shipmates or relatives getting caught up in the disastrous happenings in the USA. We do not know of any as yet, but we do know that the HMS Phoebe Chapter in Florida has some members who have not been accounted for yet, the Regent, who we are in touch with, is keeping me informed. Our thoughts are with them and hope that everyone will turn up safe and well.

The Regent, or as we would say, Chairwoman, is Jean Taylor, S/m Vic Chanter and I get, and send, emails. She keeps us informed about the Chapter. Jean and her partner were due to visit over here, and we were going to meet up for dinner and a chat, but due to her partner Richards's ill health, they were unable to come this year. But! Jean asked if they could come to the reunion next year, they have now confirmed their visit. They will be staying with a relative in Sheffield and will come from there to Scarborough. I am sure that when she returns to Florida and attends the Chapters next meeting she will have a lot to talk about.

Poor old S/m John Vickers has had a basin full of hard luck since the reunion at Weymouth. He went on holiday to Majorca and got a pain in his leg, it got

gradually worse so much so that wife Nancy asked their neighbour, who could speak a little Spanish he arranged for him to go into a private hospital in Palma where he had to have a emergency operation, or lose his leg. He stayed there for two days then moved him to National Health hospital, which John says was not very nice at all. He was kept in A&E for 48 hrs, the Holiday Rep kept phoning to see if there was a bed for him. John had hardly anything to eat because the menu was in Spanish, and no one could speak English, he asked for an interpreter but no-one turned up, it was a horrendous time. His son flew out to help and John had to stay another week, and was really glad to get home. John phoned and told me about all this before I got his letter, and he said the operation cost £5,000 which he had to pay, and Nancy had to go to the hospital by taxi each time, and that cost £30 each way. The doctor had to give permission for John to fly home. John says that he is still in a lot of pain. The EU medical cert you apply for was not available to John due to his health problems in the past, and private insurance did not cover him. He is attending hospital at home this week, so I hope the next news from him will be to say he is getting better. Good luck John.

My old friend S/m Bill Gibson from the 48/51 commission has also developed an illness, but I am sorry to say it is terminal. Bill phoned to say he has a tumour on the lung, He has been having Chemo and Radio-Therapy but to no avail. There is nothing one can say or think of to say, but I am sure everyone feels for Bill and we all hope that he is not suffering any pain. God Bless you my friend. Roy.

Veterans Lapel Badge

It is gratifying to know that lapel badges have now been received by members who sent their forms to me to post. But! If there are any more members wishing to apply would you post the forms yourself. It is not that we are adverse to posting them on, but you will receive your badge much quicker by posting the form yourself. Post To:-Mr R Godfrey, Veterans Policy Unit, Zone 1, 7th Floor, MOD, Main Bldg. Whitehall, London, SW 1 A 2HB.

I am pleased to say that the donations we made to the chosen charities requested by Mrs Sylvia Garrett and Mrs Dorothy Evans helped to raise a total of: £360 and £300 respectively.

Changes to the members list:

(Details removed to protect members' security online)

S/m Bill Main. We welcome Bills wife Sarah in becoming an associated member.

S/m David Shaw has now moved to:-
(deleted)

S/m Eric Carman
(deleted)

S/m A Tweddell. (correct the spelling of surname and Tel No) Tel:- *(deleted)*

S/m Henry Smith. *(deleted)*

Associated members. Add post codes: Mr & Mrs Rowe – *(deleted)* Mr & Mrs Murthwaite – *(deleted)*

Mrs Sylvia Garrett has now taken on S/m Bills membership as an Associated Member.

S/m Colin Abbott is shortly moving to France to take up permanent residence there, he has decided to relinquish his membership. We hope his move is for the best and he enjoys his new life there. (Could it be the cheaper petrol prices)?

HMS Gloucester

THE DEATH OF A SHIP

Taken from "HMS Gloucester – The Untold Story"

by Ken Otter

Chapter One

On the bridge the Officer of the Watch glanced at the compass then spoke into the voice pipe at his elbow. "Slow ahead port. Slow astern starboard. Wheel amidships."

Slowly the high slender bow of the cruiser swung round until it was pointing towards the harbour entrance. The mist was just beginning to lift outside the harbour. "Slow ahead both. Steer 142 degrees." The helmsman reported back to the bridge a couple of minutes later. "Both engines slow ahead, steady on 142 degrees, sir." Clearing the boom defence, HMS Gloucester headed into the open sea. The four-inch gun crews were piped to close up and keep a sharp lookout for aircraft and submarines. We were a cheerful ships company that left Alexandria on that morning in May 1941, cheerful because an hour earlier Captain Rowley had told us we were returning to England within the next few days. But before that a small job had to be done.

Crete was being invaded by German paratroops and convoys operating from Athens. Our job was to destroy the convoys before they reached their objective, once that was done we would set sail for England. It was good news, a number of crew were in danger of cracking up under the emotional strain that they had been subjected to during the past eighteen months. For the whole of this time we had played an exceedingly active part in Mediterranean War Zone. It was because of this that the ship was nicknamed the "Fighting G". Our Naval losses in the area were mounting up, but Gloucester lead a charmed life. As a general rule we hunted alone, only occasionally joining forces with the fleet when something big was planned.

On the credit side we had much to be proud of, but there was also a debit side. A bomb from an unseen Italian bomber high up in the clouds landed on the bridge. Every one was killed from the Captain to the RM boy bugler. More men were killed when the ship hit a mine, and a great number of casualties when a bomb exploded a few feet from the ships side, blasting a huge hole into the R.M.'s mess-deck. These were tragic events but the air raids were the worst, and scariest, we had to combat them day and night, week after week, month after month, there was no let up.

The men whose station was below decks suffered the most from these air raids. They could never be certain of what was happening above them, only hear the bombs explode. To them a bomb exploding close by in the sea would be

magnified a hundred times; it is to their credit that they stayed below and did their job.

Six hours after leaving Alex, the ship was attacked by Italian fighter and Torpedo carrying planes, no sooner did we chase them off than the German bombers appeared on the scene. It was our first encounter with German Planes. One bomber was hit and plunged into the sea alongside. When the radar screen showed the skies empty of German planes, it gave us some time to stock up the ammunition lockers in preparation for the next attack. The Gunnery Officer ordered the 4 inch crews to stay closed up in a state of readiness, further attacks may come in quick succession.

"The next 24 hours are most likely to be the most critical" he warned and went on to say: "The Luftwaffe are operating from Sicily, and when they discover our motive for being here we will be certain to get a warm reception." There was just enough time to have a cup of tea when the next lot arrived. They came in out of the sun, dropped their bombs and climbed into the protective clouds. The 4 inch guns were blazing furiously until nightfall came and gave us some relief from the nerve shattering noise.

In the darkness the guns were sponged out, cylinders were dropped over the side. Ammunition lockers were again replenished, it was now discovered there were little more than 500 rounds of ammo left in the shell room. The Gunnery Officer reported to the Captain and assumed his report would be sent to the Admiral on HMS Warspite.

Obviously we would be sent back to Alexandria to replenish, which would take at least two days and our return to Crete would, we hoped, see the German invaders killed or prisoners, we could then sail for England without any further delay.

Eight hours later we were still steaming round in circles within striking distance of the German aircraft operating from Crete. Shortly after daybreak the bombers returned. They were out to get us whatever the cost to themselves. Junkers, Stukas and Messerschmitts attacked us from all angles; a great number of the bombs were exploding in the sea around us we knew that survival was impossible under such heavy bombing. With all our live ammunition used up we loaded the guns with Starshell, then practice shells, no advantage could be gained firing the dummy shells, but the starshells did cause a slight diversion.

With her now silent guns, Gloucester zig-zagged desperately to avoid extermination, weaving a hazardous path through the near misses which tore great jagged holes in her side, bomb splinters rained down on the upper decks. Seven hundred men stoically waited for death they now knew to be inevitable. The gun crews and upper deck men were forced to take cover as the Stukas screamed down over the ship, machine-gunning the decks with bullets and

canon. The first bomb scored a direct hit on the after Director and a few minutes later a bomb tore the port after 4 inch out of its mounting, hurling it into the sea. This bomb was the most devastating, it destroyed our complement of boats and several carley floats. The first aid men were quickly on the scene, but there was little for them to do apart from attending to a young seaman who had a 18 inch splinter of wood embedded in his chest, and a elderly Maltese steward nursing his leg which was minus a foot, the rest were beyond human aid.

A Marine, standing beside the mangled body of his 'opposite number', looked at his watch then down at the still and silent figure. "Seven bells mate, but no tot for you today," he said quietly, a twisted ironic smile was the answer as his mate passed away. He bent down and straightened out the crumpled legs, then reverently covered the face with a bit of Canvas. I watched this ritual with a feeling of apathy wondering how long before it was my turn to shuffle off this mortal coil. There was sudden dull, muffled explosion, which seemed to come from the engine room, the ship gave a violent shudder and I knew that an aerial torpedo had found its mark. Another bomb crashed down on the bridge and the port hanger was on fire, dense yellow smoke poured from it then a great sheet of flame burst upwards as high as the mast. I joined the fire party, but there was just a trickle from the hose, just enough to sprinkle a drop of water on the deck. As I threw the hose down in disgust another bomb exploded on the 4 inch gun deck where just a short time ago I had been standing. How much more punishment could the ship take before she succumbed. How many more men would be slaughtered before the sea closed over the now bloody decks to blot out this ghastly scene.

Her engines stopped, a list to port, the ship waited with dignity for the final blow to send her down below the blue waters she had sailed through so proudly in the past. Five HE bombs had demolished her superstructure, torn gaping holes in her side, an aerial torpedo putting paid to her throbbing heart. and yet she still lived. Men were now swarming up from below decks, anxious to escape from the doomed ship.

Two serviceable Carley floats and all the available pieces of timber, eagerly commandeered by laughing, cheering men, were thrown overboard. For them the ghastly tension was over, replaced by fresh hope of survival and the spirit of adventure. Those who could swim struck out for the large carley floats HMS Fiji had dropped, as she steamed past; a very generous gesture as Fiji was herself destroyed by a concentrated bombing attack later that day. Thirty three men owe their lives to that Fiji gesture; they were later picked up by a German ship. Many years have passed since that day but we have not forgotten the great debt owed to Captain William-Powlett R.N., Fiji's captain.

The bombs were not falling in our vicinity now, the danger came from within the ship itself, the intense heat from the burning hangar and the Pom-pom ammunition was igniting and began to explode with terrifying results. I stood by

the guard rails looking down into the water at the men struggling in the sea. Some died quickly and quietly, others died slowly and painfully with great fear. A few clambered inboard again to stand pathetically on deck before jumping in again. For them there was no escape, they believed death to be inevitable, as indeed it was. Standing beside me was a man I had known for many years. HMS Gloucester was the first time we had actually served on a ship together. He gazed thoughtfully down at the overcrowded carley floats now some 300 yards away, I knew his inability to swim, I wondered how he was going to tackle the problem. As if in answer to my thoughts, he slipped off his life-jacket, and clambered over the rails, for a moment his eyes met mine. "Cheerio. Jack. I'll be seeing you" he jumped into the oily water and disappeared, he reappeared clutching at the ship's side only to slip back under the water and not come up again. "What prompts a man to throw away his life in that manner?" A trace of bitterness in the voice asking the question. I turned to find the Padre standing there. "That really is the coward's way out," he said shaking his head. "It may not be the act of a coward," I replied, "but the act of a brave man." "We are neither of us qualified to judge," he said gravely.

I went to the 4 inch gun-deck, to where I had enjoyed many happy hours of leisure until Hitler took away those carefree days and made them nightmares of pain, fear and death. I should have been shocked at the appalling sight of the dead and dying men in grotesque heaps among the empty brass cylinders. But I had only a feeling of bitter resentment against the assailants who had so ruthlessly struck them down. I found it hard to believe their supreme sacrifice would not be in vain, a sacrifice so that others might live in peace.

I gazed into the white face of the youngest member of my gun crew, who, during the nerve-racking attacks, with bullets hammering on his gun shield, with 8 inch shells screaming over his head, never failed in his duty to give the right sight correction, or fail to repeat vital messages transmitted from the bridge to the gun. A bomb splinter had torn a gaping hole in his stomach, he was still conscious, his ear phones still strapped on, all the agony of hell in his eyes. Like Jack Cornwall, he too deserves the VC for his bravery, but his only reward, an injection of morphine to make him sleep, as the ship sinks beneath the waves. I placed a rolled up overcoat beneath his head, there was nothing else I could do for him. I recognised another friend by the blue hockey shirt and green foot-ball stockings he always wore when closed up at 'action stations'. Covering him with a blanket I left the gun-deck. On the quarter-deck a marine sat on a bollard, both legs smashed up, and quietly smoking a cigarette. He offered me one. "Nothing like a fag to steady the nerves," he said cheerfully, calmly putting his cigarette packet back in his tunic pocket. Stupidly I asked how he felt. "Fine," he replied, "I'm all set to take off when the old girl wobbles." The guard rails had been slipped, he reached down and picked up a life-belt, leaning forward he slipped off the bollard and over the side, as he went he called out, "I'll be alright now mate."

A stick of bombs exploded off the starboard quarter drenching me with thick oily

and muddy water. for the first time I realised my life was also in jeopardy, something would have to be done if I was to preserve it. But I felt a strange reluctance to desert this grand ship with her cargo of dead and dying men. Dodging a Stuka's machine-gunning I went onto the gun-deck again. I felt it a privilege when a Surgeon Lieutenant asked me to help him administer morphine injections to the seriously wounded. It was good to know they would not know the horror of drowning. The errand of mercy completed we went to the forecandle, where some thirty-five men were congregated. Each man had removed his shoes and lined them up in the scuppers, not one was out of line.

It was an odd assortment, four officers, twenty or so seamen and stokers, a Fleet Air Arm rating, a cook, two Marines and a Maltese steward. 'Mackie' the ships cat was also present, cradled in the protective arms of a grimy-faced stoker. They were awaiting the Captains order to "Abandon ship".

The drone of an approaching aircraft had become suddenly audible. " Take cover" was shouted from the bridge, in ten seconds the forecandle was deserted. Three bombers approached from ahead, I saw the bombs fall, if they landed on the forecandle we would be finished, but they dropped among a group of men swimming in the water about thirty yards off the starboard bow. A feeling of nausea came as they exploded, a wanton killing of defenceless men.

Slowly now the Gloucester began to heel over until she lay at a 45 degree angle to the sea. "Abandon Ship" came the order from the bridge. Removing our outer garments, we neatly folded them and placed them on the deck, we lit a final cigarette, then walked down the side of the ship into the sea. We swam away from the ship fearful of being sucked down with her. From a safe distance we watched her stern sink, the bows rose in the water until she was almost vertical, she hung there for a long time then slowly slipped backwards below the surface, the Union Jack, still fluttering from her Jack Staff was the last to disappear. There came a violent explosion, her last agonised gasp for breath. "Goodbye Gloucester," I whispered, turning away from the great patch of oily water that was gradually creeping towards me. The water was warm and calm, the sun was shining and the now cloudless sky unmarred by the presence of hostile aircraft. I discarded my life jacket and shirt, tied my knife lanyard more securely round my waist, and started swimming at a steady pace in the direction of the nearest island.

To Be Cont.

I expect I am repeating myself here, but as many of you know next year will be our tenth reunion, not quite ten years from our inauguration, but times change as do the availability of hotels. Some of our first reunions were held in the Autumn when the weather was a bit cold, so we sought out hotels that could accommodate us during the Spring, when the weather was a little bit warmer. So far we have been lucky, although I am sorry to say we are having to look at

hotels further afield, or using hotels we have used before. Prices have risen vastly since our first meeting, travelling costs too. This year we had a freebie, I wish we could have more. The price we negotiated for next year was too good to turn down, I am sorry it means a long way to travel, but if you think of the prices hotels are now asking for a long weekend in 2006, and the price we got from the Rivelyn Hotel in Scarborough, the difference could be enough to offset the cost of travel? No thought has been given to 2007 yet, although we expect it will be in the Southern part of the country. Many of you attend other reunions and know what the hotels you stay at are like, any information about hotels in the South would be appreciated.

I had one such from a shipmate who went to a reunion in Torquay, no! not the Trecarn in Babbacombe, but one in the town which caters for RN ships reunions. He was most complimentary of his stay there. Yes! it is a long way to travel, but as aforesaid we may have to look further afield. More about that at the next AGM.

Your hotel reservation form I hope is not too difficult to fill in, just remember to cross out all that is not applicable to you, and put in the total amount. The deposit is a bit more than usual, but we have compensated for that by making the cut-off date later, which means if you have to cancel before the cut-off date, (April 29th), you should get your deposit returned. Any mistakes made on the form that cannot be rectified, phone me and I will send another one to you. If you want a ground floor room please state it on the form, I advise you to reserve as early as possible.

The hotel lift is only capable of carrying maybe four people, but it does cover all floors, including the basement dining room. I repeat the parking arrangements, there is no car park, but you will be able to park in the roads surrounding the hotel, make sure you get a windscreen ticket from reception, it cost just 15p for the duration of your stay, and they will want to know your vehicle registration number. Parking for disabled card holders is free in Scarborough. For those so minded, there is a Gala Bingo Club in the town.

You can now look forward to Christmas and all those presents you'll get?