

warfare. They needed equipment. Within the year they would find themselves patrolling the glaciers of Iceland and Greenland. The deaths of the thirteen Hallamshires on the Afridi was a terrible blow to the battalion and their families. They were poor working class men from Sheffield and adjacent towns and they had been the only breadwinner of their families. By November 1941 one of the widows wrote to the Commanding Officer at their headquarters in Iceland describing the difficulties faced by the bereaved families. The Hallamshires set up an 'Afridi Christmas Fun' to bring a little happiness at Christmas for the widows and children of the men killed. The appeal raised £44 and 10 shillings and Christmas gifts equivalent to £3 to each widow and £1 for each child were sent to the relatives. The Norwegians have also erected a memorial for the Hallamshires who died in the Afridi bombing in Namsos. The York and Lancaster Regiment's official history of the Norwegian campaign states that although the Hallamshire Battalion 'had only met the enemy on land in two minor actions the success of these and the whole experience gained in the campaign definitely raise the morale of all ranks.

The extreme climatic and other difficulties imposed very heavy tasks upon some of the officers and other ranks with specialist duties. Nevertheless, in spite of everything, they succeeded in carrying them out. In this connection particular mention must be made of the Assistant Transport Officer 2/Lieutenant J. Randall, and his twenty drivers, who had to work entirely with local lorries and cars: the Signals Officer, 2/Lieutenant S.M. de Bartolome, and his signallers; and last but by no means least, of the Adjutant, Captain H. J.W. Marsh. The names of the other ranks killed in H.M.S. Afridi on 3rd May 1940, were: Corporal Goddard; Lance-Corporal Starkey; Privates Barker, Bell, Bruce, Crookes, Lee, Lockwood, Martin, Peacock, Shaw, Shepherd and Wade.' (Page 123, The York and Lancaster Regiment VOL III, 1955). A veteran of the Norwegian campaign states that part of the horror of the Afridi's sinking was that at least one of the dying Hallamshires could be heard crying for help as the other destroyers drew away. They had been trapped beneath the buckled steel and could not be rescued, but were aware of their fates as the destroyer slowly took water and slipped beneath the waves. Surviving Hallamshires could also hear the loud metallic crashes of U-boat torpedoes against the hull of their transport ships. Fortunately for the British, a technical fault in torpedo fuses meant that although some reached their target they had failed to detonate.

This newsletter was finished early to give some of you a better chance of reserving your attendance at next years reunion. We apologise for rushing you but in actual fact it is not much different than other years. Do not worry if you cannot get your deposits in by the 9th Nov it does not mean you are too late, the cut off date is in April, a long way off yet.

Subscriptions were due this month, have you paid yours??

If anything crops up B4 the Dec edition that is essential for members to have, we will send it to you ASAP.

Remembrance Sunday is 11/11 this year, it would be nice to see a few more members at the Bournemouth Parade, we usually start about 1230. Our memorial stone is behind Bournemouths memorial in front of the Town Hall. (Free parking beneath the town hall for members).

# HMS <sup>1</sup>Phoebe Association

## Newsletter

October 2007



Derek West - Roy Pavely

Lil Pavely - John Barrett



The Medway Sea Cadets  
Falklands  
Memorial Plaque.

We meet with the  
Mayor of Medway  
At  
The Falklands Plaque Dedication

Here we are just coming to the end of August and I have started on the October newsletter? I have started it early as September is going to be a busy month for Lil and I, you may even be reading this before October is with us. We have various hospital and doctor appointments this month, for me it is a series of dental treatments, probably resulting in all ten teeth that are left being removed and denture plates replacing them, one thing about having this done it won't cost me a penny. Towards the end of September Lil will be in hospital having laser treatment on her eyes, at the moment she is finding it difficult to see and leaves it to me to read your mail etc. Apparently it only takes a few minutes to complete the operation although it will be a while before she gets any benefit from it. Hopefully it will be successful. We are off to Cornwall a couple of days after her treatment, not long this time as we want to be back for our annual visit to Bournemouth for Remembrance Sunday which this year actually falls on the 11th November. We have not had any definite promises of members being there this year, we are hoping it wont be just Lil and I and Padre Ray. Unfortunately we are unable to attend the TS Phoebe Trafalgar Day Dinner at Bournemouth our commitments this year are taking precedent. Our apologies to the TS for our non attendance. Our Standard has seen some service during the past year, it has been paraded a number of times by S/m Derek West, even now he is about to parade with it again, then again later at Chatham. It will be a mad rush to get it back to me for the Remembrance Parade in Bournemouth. It looks like I may have to ask for one of the Sea cadets to parade the standard for us, as S/m Bob Hobbs is finding it difficult now. Might end up with me fitting a clamp to my Buggie?? I often wonder why shipmates living near Bournemouth never turn up at the memorial, yet shipmates living many miles away do so??

Shipmates Taffy & Lillian Beckerton left these shore moths ago, we have not had any news from them except their address, we hope they have settled down and the sun has helped Taffy health-wise, perhaps we might get a x-mas card from them?? Our membership went up and down during the past year, we feel saddened at the loss of some shipmates, but are heartened by the number of new members that joined us, We also had a few more associated members join us. The number of newsletter being sent out now is around 175. Donations dribble in and with the various profits from raffles, auctions, and slops it means subscriptions will remain the same for at least another year. If all subscriptions were paid fully up to-date the funds would look a lot healthier, but we are not destitute just yet. We had the welfare fund ready to pay out to any member who needed help due to the floods, but it was not called upon, remember this fund is there to help you, whatever the need is, if we can help out in any way we will, privately. Anyone who does not have internet access I am sure that all the members who have would help you out. Look in the back of your members list, find the members email address list, all those listed have internet access, a phone call to any of them would I am sure help you out. I am getting better with the association web site, I have even managed to get a new guestbook on line to replace the old one, all it wants now is a few visitors to sign in, how about it you computer buffs? More names in the book induces others to read and sign up. The Medway Sea Cadet Corp are dedicating a plinth and plaque to commemorate the Kent armed forces who saw action in the Falklands conflict, it will be the only memorial plaque in Kent, we thought we would support this 23rd of September venue with a donation and our presence.

10th 1940, Winston Churchill became Prime Minister. On that same fateful day, Hitler unleashed his long-awaited Blitzkrieg in the West, and the attention of the world shifted from Scandinavia to Holland, Belgium and France. 5,500 British and French troops had to be evacuated from Namsos. It was an operation that could only be done during the hours of darkness which at this time of the year were short. The operation was dogged by fog. Captain Lord Louis Mountbatten in the destroyer Kelly was part of the the naval taskforce under Admiral Cunningham who stressed the importance of speed and the minimum of equipment being taken by the men. Most of Maurice Force was evacuated between 9.15 and 1 a.m. on 2nd May. But the York and Lancasters - a total of 780 men were still some way from Namsos. Their job had been to hold the retreat in good order, to deny the Germans transport and protect the embarkation. Admiral Vivian who was ashore at Namsos to superintend the operation called for volunteers from anyone who could drive a car to take any available lorry to fetch them. A convoy of vehicles was assembled and the bulk of the regiment reached the pier by 2.20. But the British destroyer HMS Afridi had to remain. Lieutenant Colonel Robins and 33 men of the Hallamshires had been detailed to blow away the last rearguard bridge at around midnight and had ten miles of atrocious, snowbound road to cover had not arrived.

As hilltops were in view against the morning twilight lorries clattered onto the pier at 3.15 a.m. and disgorged the rearguard. The Afridi cast off. The campaign in Central Norway had lasted 16 days.

Lieutenant Colonel Hingston who fought with the KOYLI at Namsos wrote: 'The retreat of 146 Infantry Brigade to Namdalseidet is not a bright story in the history of the British army. Indeed it is doubtful whether British troops have ever been forced to retire with so little effort on the part of the enemy. On the other hand it is also doubtful if a British force have ever been asked to do so much with so little.' Attacks by the Luftwaffe on the convoy started at 8.45 in the morning with high-bombers and JU 88 divebombers. The Hallamshires endured an attack by 3 Stukas as the Afridi attempted to rejoin the evacuation convoy. One bomb hit her squarely at the foot of her foremast and plunged on down to burst between decks, causing heavy casualties, and starting a furious blaze. Another fell close alongside her forecastle and blew a hole in her hull. The combination was too much for the ship. More than a thousand hungry and cold troops were terrorised. An effort was made to take the Afridi in tow by the stern, but had to be abandoned when it was clear she was foundering. It is understood that some of the Hallamshires were trapped below deck and still alive when they were abandoned. Their comrades could hear their cries as they pulled away in the other destroyers. The Arctic waters would have killed a man through exposure in a matter of minutes. Survivors of the crew and the Hallamshires were taken aboard the destroyers Griffin and Imperial. Amongst the hundred dead were thirteen soldiers from the rearguard of the York and Lancasters who had protected the embarkation and in the words of Captain McIntyre 'had endured so much.' The Hallamshires arrived in the Firth of Clyde on 8th May 1940, disembarked and re-formed at Hawick. Ironically the Allied operation in Norway proved more successful after the failure of the Central Norwegian campaign. On May 13, at Bjerkvik, north of Narvik, the Allies mounted the war's first combined operations, involving shelling from warships, infantry and armoured vehicles landed by specially built landing craft and air support from aircraft carriers. It lasted effectively until May 28th, when the French 13th Foreign Legion Demi-Brigade with the support of British, Polish and Norwegian troops finally recaptured Narvik, although by then other events in the Low Countries and France had captured the news. The Germans expected the Allies to try to make their stay in Narvik permanent - but on June 7th the French and British departed, having covered the evacuation of the Allied armies from Norway. Norway and Denmark were Totally in German hands. Narvik was again occupied by the Germans. Norway was to remain in German hands until the end of the war.

The Hallamshires had experienced a bloody and frustrating baptism of fire. They had seen terrible things. It was clear to the men of 146th Brigade that they needed training in Arctic

The rest of 146th Brigade marched towards Central Norway on the 19th. The first march was 20 miles east to Grong. They then marched 50 miles south west via Kvam to Steinkjer, linked up with 2,000 Norwegian troops and hoped to deploy around Verdalsora. This put the British 146th Infantry Brigade 80 km from Trondheim.

The advance to Trondheimsfiord had to be endured with passive courage. Bombardment by German naval guns and aircraft and attack by highly-trained and mobile German ski-troops dogged their movements. The French Chasseurs Alpains - fully trained mountain troops - landed at Namsos on 22nd from the liner Ville d'Alger but without some essential strap for their skis. They were effectively immobilised particularly as they relied on mules for transport. Again their troopship left Norway carrying most of the stores, some antitank guns and an invaluable anti-aircraft battery. The Hallamshires engaged the enemy at Beitstad and Colour Sergeant Major Howden won a military medal for his bravery. They were eventually relieved by the Chasseurs.

The overall plan for Mauriceforce was that the brigade would advance on Trondheim and link up with the Norwegian forces retreating northwards, but the arrival of substantial reinforcements for General von Falkenhorst's army, despite the attempt at a blockade of German shipping by Allied submariners in Skaggerak, made the Allies look again at the weaknesses of their position. It was clear to the senior officers that the British troops in Norway were not properly equipped or trained for the position in which they found themselves. Because of the poor organisation of their embarkation, they had not even their full complement of stores and equipment. General Carton de Wiart signalled the War Office: 'I see little chance of carrying out decisive or, indeed, any operations unless enemy air activity is considerably reduced.'

The German army was well-organised, well-trained and recently reinforced. It quickly became clear that the British plan to retake the centre of Norway would not work and, as to emphasise the point, on April 26th the German 196th Division, on the right of the 21st Corps, succeeded in joining up with the 181st Division on the left, south of Trondheim. Germany found the Norwegian campaign more difficult to win conclusively than had been expected, and continued to pour in men and equipment to reinforce those who had formed the initial invasion. These troops were landed at Oslo on April 27th. The 4th Lincolns and 1/4th KOYLI endured the worst attacks, casualties and humiliating retreats.

Captain Dick Newsum in the 4th Lincolns wrote: 'We travelled by train to Steinkjer at the head of the Trondheim fjord. On arrival we discovered how short of equipment we were, as much of it had been left behind in the UK due to rather hurried and mismanaged departure. We had mortars and bombs but no sights, telephones but no exchanges, and absolutely no transport, not the best way to start a war.' By April 23rd 146th Brigade found themselves dominated by enemy air power, and had to retreat from their position on Trondheimsfiord which they did in good order. Without artillery or anti-aircraft guns, they could do no more than stand grimly on the defensive. Behind them their base lay in ruins. The curse for the British infantry and naval forces was undoubtedly the Stuka dive-bomber with its 'screaming' siren. The destroyer HMS Bittern was sunk in Namsos Harbour on April 30th. All Allied efforts were now concentrated on Narvik, and the blocking of the vital route for iron resources through the port.

General Carton de Wiart received orders to evacuate Namsos on 27th April. The Hallamshires and the rest of 146th Brigade were to leave on the nights of the 1st and 2nd of May. British and French troops were to withdraw from Andalsnes and Namsos, King Haakon and General Ruge (and the Norwegian gold reserves) headed for evacuation from Tromsø. The final phase of the Norwegian battle began on April 26th.

The pull back to Narvik on April 26th had also marked the beginning of the final phase of Neville Chamberlain's career as British Prime Minister. A motion of censure in the House of Commons debated on May 7th and 8th brought about his resignation, and on May

The 2008 reunion has now been confirmed for May 2nd to May 5th at the Coventry Hill Hotel, Allesley. The reservations etc are a bit different so bear with me while I explain it: Firstly all reservations and payments will be made through the Association, (Send us your cheque and not the hotel). **IT IS ALSO A BANK HOLIDAY WEEK END** Reservations plus the deposit of £25 per person must be paid to the Association Treasurer by the 9th November 2007. Sorry it gives you such a short time to decide, but all payments are refundable up to April 10th 2008. So you can reserve and cancel later if you cannot or decide not to attend.

No one will be turned away if booking in later than the 9th November.

There is a bus service every ten minutes from the rail station to a stop about two minutes walk from the hotel, Bus route No 909.

The taxi fare is £7 each way. (All Bus fares for seniors are free from April 1st 2008).

As this is a package deal there are some things we cannot change although we will try. A "Happy Hour" is down for 1400 to 1600, we hope to change this to the evening. Saturday "Gala Dinner" This is a set dinner, although we have a list of six different things to each course we have to choose the same for every one, we know some will not like what we have chosen, but we have to choose what we think will be a majority choice. For instance on Sunday there is a roast lunch laid on followed by a finger buffet dinner, we hope to change it around. So! for the Sat "Gala Dinner" we have chosen Roast Norfolk Turkey as opposed to red meat. The usual 'Prawn Cocktail' for a starter is not on the menu so we have chosen Tomato & Basil soup. For desert there was not much we could do but chose Fresh Fruit Cocktail, with coffee and mints to follow, there is a cheese board, but for this it will cost you £2 extra. (normally I would not eat Turkey or Cream of Tomato & Basil soup). We tried to get an A la Carte menu but this would have meant no package deal and the reunion cost would have been far greater.

The AGM will take place on Sunday morning. (Dress optional, time TBC.) A coach will be laid on for Saturday, I hope to have it drop off at two places of interest. 1st drop - Warwick for the Castle and Gardens, 2nd drop - Stratford on Avon. We may be able to get the coach to drive round to Anne Hathaways cottage and Willies place? (If you're going punting on the river don't get stuck up the pole)

Pick up in reverse order. Nothing laid on for Sunday as yet.

Make sure you look at the road map we will be sending out later, the hotel is adjacent to the A45, but there is only one junction you can turn off coming from the east or the west, miss it and there's a fair way to go before you can turn round.

Coventry airport is not far away, about two miles? If you live near a airport see if flights to Coventry/B'ham are any cheaper than by train. Remember busses are free for seniors.

We met up with John and Derek at Gillingham for the Plaque dedication, I had the wrong times sent to me and arrived three hours early, coffee in Pembroke House was very welcome. The rain kept away and the breeze kept it cool. Their PA system broke down a couple of times, (I should have had ours with us). But it all went off quite well, although a little bit more organisation was wanting. Met the Mayor and other Vets, the tea and a tot went down well. Left at 1430 and home for 1645 in time for the Chelsea match??. RP.

## THE CHANNEL DASH

4

On March 22nd [1941](#), the *Gneisenau* and the *Scharnhorst* had sunk 22 British merchant ships in the [Atlantic](#) – totalling 115,000 tons. Such losses simply could not have been sustained and destroying the two ships was seen as critical if the English were going to win the [Battle of the Atlantic](#). Both formidable ships returned to Brest harbour for repairs after their triumphs on the 22nd.

Brest was an unusual choice for a refuge as the ships could easily be trapped in by the British Home Fleet if they attempted to sail back to Germany or by the fleet in Gibraltar if they attempted to get the Mediterranean. Brest was also in reach of RAF bombers. When it became known that both ships had berthed in Brest, [Bomber Command](#) made them a primary target following an order from [Winston Churchill](#). Several bombing raids had damaged the two ships but did not disable them. In one raid, Flying Officer Kenneth Campbell of No 22 Squadron hit the *Gneisenau* with a torpedo – but to no avail. Campbell was awarded a posthumous [Victoria Cross](#) for his bravery. In June [1941](#), the *Prinz Eugen* joined both ships in Brest

In April 1941, the French Resistance had gained information that the *Scharnhorst* and the *Gneisenau* were about to break harbour and make a dash for Germany. The Royal Navy covered this threat with 'Operation Fuller' should it have taken place. In fact, there was no dash for Germany but the addition of the *Prinz Eugen* made the force even more formidable.

The Royal Navy assumed that Raeder, the head of the German Navy, would not tolerate three ships remaining in harbour and not doing anything. The Royal navy therefore assumed that the three ships would make a dash. It concluded that: The three ships would make their dash at night; They assumed that this would be done on a cloudy night to give the ships cover and make it impossible for bombers to operate. They assumed that any dash would be as near to the French coast as was possible for such large ships so that fighter cover could be called if the Germans needed it – night or not.

[Admiral Ramsey's](#) force at Dover was suitably strengthened for any attempt by the Germans to get to Germany. The Royal Navy and the RAF worked in unison on the plan to destroy the German ships – a plan that involved the Fleet Air Arm, Coastal Command, [Bomber Command](#) and [Fighter Command](#). Though Bomber Command would not fly at night, it made plans for any attempt by the three ships to make a daylight dash.

In June 1941, Hitler launched [Operation Barbarossa](#) – the attack on [Russia](#). While the attack was massively successful in its initial stages, Hitler became more and more obsessed with defending his northern flank – believing that the Allies would launch an attack via [Norway](#) or land men and equipment in Murmansk. He therefore ordered that all three ships should return to Germany rather than risk yet more damage from bombing raids in Brest. Hitler had already ordered the massive *Tirpitz* to Norwegian waters. The addition of the *Prinz Eugen*, *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau* would make for an awesome naval presence there. On January 12th, [1942](#), Hitler gave the order for them to return to Germany.

conspicuous from the air and vulnerable to air attack during the day. So a convoy of destroyers joined the troopships 100 miles North of Namsos at Lillesjona. Destroyers Afridi, Sikh, Matabele, Mashona and Nubian went alongside the Chrobry and Empress of Australia to

transfer the York and Lancasters and Lincolnshire troops of 146th Infantry Brigade. As soon as the operation began, the Hallamshires were to discover the terror of Stuka dive-bombers. Captain McIntyre in his book 'Narvik' writes:

'Enemy aircraft found them even so far north. The destroyers left in a flurry of frothing stern wash, curving bow waves and the tall thudding splashes of bomb burst for their high-speed run down the coast to Namsos where they arrived during the night of the 16th April. By daylight the Hallamshires had all been landed, the men dispersed from the quay sides and all traces of their arrival obliterated. However, the hurry of the embarkation and the constant harassment by the Luftwaffe meant that the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry of 146th Brigade were still aboard the Empress of Australia. The air-raids at Lillesjona had been almost continuous. Near misses constantly shook the converted liners and Captain McIntyre wrote that the bombardment 'shook also the morale of the young inexperienced soldiers, receiving their baptism of fire cooped up helplessly aboard.' Unfortunately the Empress of Australia was sent home still carrying 170 tons of stores. The Chrobry left with 130 tons of supplies and stores still aboard.

On the 17th the 148th Brigade landed at Andalsnes. Operation Sickforce was to experience massive losses - 1,402 men in series of defeats. 148th Infantry Brigade never saw active service again. John Crook would have been familiar with the personal experiences of soldiers at Andalsnes because he was posted as a 2nd Lieutenant to the 1st Battalion York and Lancasters following their return to Britain after being caught up in this fiasco. They had been rapidly evacuated when their position became impossible and they had taken heavy casualties. The Germans were now isolated in Narvik, although with plenty of captured Norwegian weapon in addition to their own, and with a 'Mountain Marine' unit of 2,600 men, survivors of the annihilated destroyer fleet, to use the Norwegian rifles and machine guns. This force was ordered to 'hold out for as long as possible'. Each day, the RAF attacked German military installations, and the sea war continued with losses on both sides.' The traitor Quisling, meanwhile, had been ousted on April 15th, and replaced by an 'Administrative Council' of Norwegian bureaucrats and lawyers. Suddenly and belatedly, this government on April 18th, declared war on Germany. The problem for 146th Brigade known as 'Mauriceforce' was that there was no air cover. Most of its supplies had not been landed. The British troops were 'totally inexperienced in any form of warfare, let alone the specialised Arctic version facing them, without anti-aircraft guns or artillery.' The Hallamshires were commanded by Lt. Col C G Robins. Instead of having maps of the Namsos area, they had been issued with maps of Narvik. There is no doubt that the soldiers had not been adequately trained or equipped for this operation. The transport section were landed in Namsos without any vehicles. They had to beg and borrow cars and trucks from the local Norwegians.

It was somewhat fortunate that they had been moved out of Namsos. Because within 24 hours of embarkation the Luftwaffe descended on the town, completely unopposed and reduced the place to a rubble and set it ablaze. The base for 'Mauriceforce' was largely obliterated, making reinforcement and supply almost impossible. Commander Ravenhill on the Nubian observed on the 20th of April: 'The whole place was a mass of flames from end to end and the glare on the snows of the surrounding mountains produced an unforgettable spectacle.' The Hallamshires were under the overall command of General Carton de Wiart, a Victoria Cross holder who inspired his men with awe by his cool contempt for danger during air attacks. But the general knew that the position of his brigades was untenable. The Hallamshires were ordered to move into a reserve position south west to Namdalseid via Rodhammer.

Berwick-on-Tweed, Northumberland, Durham, Yorkshire, Lincolnshire, Rutland, Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire, and Derbyshire. These locations provided the troops for the 49th (East Riding) Division that is now based at Beeston in Nottinghamshire and still wears the Polar Bear badge inaugurated by General 'Bubbles' Barker after service in Iceland.

The Hallamshire Battalion of the York and Lancaster Regiment was based in Sheffield and part of the 146th Infantry Brigade. The Brigade's HQ was in Doncaster and also included 4th Battalion, The Lincolnshire Regiment: Lincoln 1st/4th Battalion, and The King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry: Wakefield. The Norwegian campaign seems to have become overshadowed by other perhaps more dramatic events in the Second World War. Despite haphazard preparation, lack of training in Arctic warfare, poor coordination between naval, air and land forces Norway could have been won for the allies. This Arctic Circle location was the scene of intense fighting during April and May 1940. Allied forces, headed by Great Britain, and Axis forces, headed by Germany, clashed fiercely to secure Narvik, which was a main shipping port for high-grade Swedish iron ore. The ore was a key element for the production of high-quality steel, and therefore critical to the armaments industries of both Great Britain and Germany. The fight for Narvik resulted in more than 55 surface ships, submarines, U-boats and airplanes being sunk in the clear water in and around the port city. When World War II broke out, the Scandinavian nations, including Norway, remained neutral. Because Norway represented an important strategic location, Britain and Germany both decided to violate Norwegian neutrality at almost the same time. Unknown to the other side, and only hours apart, Britain and Germany dispatched large fleets to secure Norway. The German attack was designed to capture all of Norway's important airports and urban centres during simultaneous attacks involving its navy, troops landed from ship and paratroops dropped from the air. The British fleet was just behind the German vessels, and both sides battled a fierce gale to achieve their objective. Using a force of 10 destroyers, each of which carried 200 specially trained Austrian mountain troops and coastal artillery personnel, Germany captured Narvik on April 9-10, 1940, after blowing away the ancient Norwegian coastal defence vessels Eidsvold and Norge. The British counterattacked on April 10, 1940, in what became known as the First Battle of Narvik.

On the 11th, the RAF attacked Sola airfield, Stavanger, and lost 1 Wellington out of 6. German destroyers Wilhelm Heidkamp and Anton Schmitt were sunk in this battle and Dieter von Roeder was put out of action by fire resulting from a hit. The British lost destroyers H.M.S. Hardy and H.M.S. Hunter, and H.M.S. Hotspur was badly damaged. The British withdrew, only to mount a counterattack on April 13. This time, they brought more firepower to what became known as the Second Battle of Narvik: the battleship H.M.S. Warspite was accompanied by no less than nine destroyers. The German fleet, low on fuel and ammunition, tried to flee from the British onslaught, but they had nowhere to go. All of the remaining German destroyers were annihilated, many of them running aground on the sides of the fjords. During the next six weeks, a siege of Narvik by Allied troops ensued. British warships and the Polish destroyers Orp Grom and Orp Blyskawica prowled the fjords and shelled German positions on land. German bombers pounded the ships, sending Orp Grom to the bottom. By the 14th, the British North Western Expeditionary Force had begun to land at Harstad, some 96 km from Narvik, and separated from the port by a sea channel and snow-covered mountains, on the 15th.

John Crook was being trained at the York and Lancaster's Infantry Training Centre in York when the Hallamshires were conveyed across the North Sea in the Empress of Australia. Destination: Namsos as part of 'Mauriceforce'- a special operation to secure Central Norway. There was considerable concern that Namsos was

The British very quickly became aware of increased Germany activity not only in Brest but also along the French northern coastline. The French Resistance reported that former French coastal airbases were being more and more used by the Luftwaffe. The Royal Navy concluded that they knew the ships would be leaving Brest at night – they just did not know when! In response to this, the Royal Navy tried to predict the route the ships might take and laid more mines – a total of 1000+ British mines were already placed in the English Channel.

A study of weather predictions led the Navy to conclude that the ships would sail between February 10th and 15th 1942, as cloud cover would make such a journey much safer. Coastal Command, the Fleet Air Arm, Fighter Command, etc were all put on the alert. A submarine, the 'Sea Lion', had been positioned off of Brest – its task was to watch the harbour as opposed to attacking the ships.

The Germans had put a great deal of thought into Operation Cerberus. British coastal radar had been jammed as a matter of course – but by February 1942, the success of the jamming had become extensive. Vice-Admiral Ciliax, commander of the battle-cruisers, could also sail knowing that the Luftwaffe could provide a total of 280 fighter planes to give aerial cover for the duration of the journey. Colonel Adolf Galland, charged with the task for the Luftwaffe, had mostly formidable [Me-109's](#) and FW-190's at his disposal, along with [Me-110's](#). From the start of the journey, Ciliax could expect a minimum of 16 fighters covering his force and a maximum of 32. When he got near to the Straits of Dover, this number would be increased significantly. The convoy, which included 6 destroyers, left Brest harbour at 22.45 hours on February 11th 1942. The Sea Lion had ended its watch at 21.35 hours as it assumed that the ships would not leave after this time on that day as they would not get to the Dover Straits in darkness. Nine German naval vessels and their supporting ships left Brest without being seen – a Hudson spotter plane using radar had swept past the convoy but faulty radar was common in early [1942](#) and it 'saw' nothing. Any visual contact was impossible due to the cloud cover. Other spotter planes also suffered from radar failure, allowing the convoy to round the Brest peninsula unseen.

By dawn next day, February 12th, the convoy was sailing off Barfleur, south of the Isle of Wight. Fog had assisted in camouflaging its movements. Both Coastal Command and [Fighter Command](#) had failed to pass on to [Admiral Ramsey](#) at Dover Castle, the fact that their surveillance had been hindered by faulty equipment. On February 12th, Ramsey still believed that the German convoy had yet to sail and he stood down the forces that had been brought together to attack the Germans.

For three large warships and six destroyer escorts, to sail up the English Channel undetected for 300 miles seems incredible. However, the weather and faulty radar equipment served the Germans well and gave them 13 hours at sea undetected. Ramsey's defence force was also in disarray. His MTB (motor torpedo boat) force based in Ramsgate had been in action the previous night and was still recovering from this;

[Bomber Command's](#) planes would have found it nearly impossible to operate because of the weather conditions and the Bristol Beaufort squadrons based around the coast were forced to use different air strips because the one they wanted to use (North Coates) was snow bound. One patrol plane had flown directly over Ciliax's force but had not broken radio silence and only passed on its information when the plane had reached its base by which time the convoy was steaming passed Beachy Head in Sussex. At Dover, the gun batteries based there engaged the Germans. However, their shells fell short simply because they had to guess the exact whereabouts of the ships because of the poor weather conditions. MTB's from Dover attacked but they could not get near to the ships and had to fire their torpedoes from a distance of 2 miles – none hit. German fighter cover was ferocious. An attack by torpedo-carrying Swordfish planes also failed. All six planes were lost in the attack and their commander, Lieutenant-Commander Eugene Esmonde, was awarded the [Victoria Cross](#). As the German convoy continued to steam towards its base, there were more British attacks. Poor weather, poor communications and a curious desire for secrecy even among the British forces fighting during the attack all played a part in the Germans successfully getting through.

The bad weather (cloud at 700 feet) meant that bombers could not get to the 7000 feet they needed to drop their armour-piercing bombs if they were to be effective – they simply could not see their targets. Of the 242 bombers involved in the engagement, only 39 are known to have dropped their bombs – and none of them found their target. British destroyers sent out from Harwich to attack the Germans were attacked by planes from the RAF as no-one had told the RAF that destroyers from Harwich were being sent into action. At dawn on February 13th, the German convoy sailed into port. The [Scharnhorst](#) had hit a mine but Ciliax was eager to contact Berlin that their operation had been a great success. The Germans had lost just one of their minor escort ships and seventeen fighter planes. The British response to the breakout from Brest had been ineffective from a military point of view. However, there were few recriminations as the [Gneisenau](#), [Prinz Eugen](#) and [Scharnhorst](#) were now all bottled up to the east of Britain where they could play no part in the [Battle of the Atlantic](#). Even the commander of the Kriegsmarine, Admiral Raeder, stated that the Germans had won “a tactical victory (but) had suffered a strategic defeat.” [Roosevelt](#) contacted [Churchill](#) to congratulate him on what had occurred: the [Prinz Eugen](#) was sunk by a British submarine ten days after getting to port and the [Scharnhorst](#), hit by a mine, was out of action for eight months for repairs – but was sunk in December [1943](#).

---

The following letter is from our intrepid diver shipmate, Jim Hutchison. reporting his recent recall to Malta:- I was invited by Simon Cussens of Malta to attend the 65th Anniversary of the convoy "Operation Pedestal" in which HMS Phoebe played her part.

"I flew from Gatwick by Air Malta and was met at Luqa airport by Simon who took me to my hotel in Sliema, a nice hotel in which I enjoyed my stay. Simon had also invited Allen Shaw, the sole survivor of the tanker SS Ohio which was towed into Malta on the feast day of Santa Marija, thus the convoy is better known in Malta by the name of Santa Mariga.

An evening Commemoration Service<sup>7</sup> was held on Tuesday 14th August at Custom House overlooking Grand Harbour, Valletta. Allan and myself were introduced to the Deputy Prime Minister and various other dignitaries. The Maltese navy supplied a Patrol Boat to take us out into the harbour to lay wreaths in honour of the people killed during the convoy. It was a very moving and emotional event and during the service 'Ave Maria' was sung by Nicola Said. The armed force of Malta then fired a salute using old WWII 303 rifles.

On Thursday it was Santa Maria feast day, Simon took Allen, and Allen's son Peter, who was accompanying Allen for his stay to a village where the church is dedicated to the convoy and has a painting hung there of the Ohio entering Grand Harbour. The church was wonderfully illuminated outside and all the streets were decorated with lights and bunting. The firework displays celebrating the anniversary throughout the island were magnificent. We were invited to take part in a Communion Service as the 'guests of honour' meeting the congregation after the service we were congratulated heartily by them all.

We also had a private meeting with the Archbishop of Malta, he had never met anyone from the convoy, it was his special wish to meet us two, quite an honour! We were also taken to dinner by 3 of the Fathers of the Churches of Malta to a pub named the 'George' so named in recognition of Malta's George Cross. There were many photos along the walls of the convoy, including one of the Phoebe escorting the Indomitable.

Simon restores WWII military vehicles and has a long range desert Land Rover he is working on complete with its guns etc, he also has a Austin pick-up fully restored in wartime Maltese camouflage, he took us for a ride round St Julian's which caused a lot of interest. Simon said it was quite hot driving and said he would put on the 'air conditioning' and pushed the front windscreen up, which was normal on vehicles of that age. We visited the Air Museum and looked over the rebuilt Hurricane and Spitfire, we also went to Kalkara and Vittoriosa, and Simons parents took us out on their boat around the harbour and out to the Fairway bouy and back, this was the first time I had ever entered Grand Harbour without having to stand to attention!!

It was a wonderful eight days & I thoroughly enjoyed being back in Malta, the temperature was 86/90 F every day.

*Cheers Jim, glad you were able to make it & hope you make the next one too. (Lil and I would love to visit Malta again. "How about a reunion there"?? One week's accommodation out there is not much more than a week end here)!!*

---

## THE STORY OF JOHN CROOK IN NORWAY

When the Second World War started on 3rd September 1939 John Crook was a 24 year old soldier and a lance corporal in a territorial Manchester Battalion. He would obtain an emergency commission in the York and Lancaster Regiment in early 1940 and receive his training in the infantry training centre in York that was part of Britain's Northern Command army group. The HQ was in York. Troops were stationed at