

HMS Phoebe Association

Newsletter
February
2008



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Here we are one month into the New Year. We hope everyone got what they wanted for Christmas and had a good time on New Years eve. We wish everyone a happy and prosperous future, a return to full health for those who are suffering, and a quick recovery for those in hospital.

Sadly in the run up to Christmas we lost shipmate Jack Potter. Jack lived in North Carolina with his wife and family. He met his future wife Lories when the cruiser went to Brooklyn for repairs in 1942, they were married a short time later on April 5th. At that time Jack was an acting PO (Tas). He joined the association in 2001. Although very ill at the time he enjoyed getting the newsletter, but his health deteriorated and Jack ‘Crossed the Bar’ peacefully in his sleep. Our deepest sympathy and condolence to Lories and Family. Roy. (Secretary).

Decorations and Honours Register.

In the last newsletter I mentioned this article, since then I have had more details from the company regarding who can be registered.

Men and women who have been awarded any award by either King George VI or by Queen Elizabeth II can have their names and the award listed. This includes such honours as Mentioned in Dispatches and any other award. If you are one of these and wish to be listed please phone the following number for information. 01202 202405 (Adrian Checketts).

I sent a message on behalf of all shipmates to the Queen and Duke of Edinburgh congratulating them on their Diamond Wedding Anniversary I had a letter in return from a Lady in Waiting to say the Queen thanks us for our message and sends best wishes to all shipmates.

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May I take this opportunity to thank the many shipmates and friends who sent us Christmas and New Year greetings, the postman’s bag gets bigger, in fact I do not think there are too many subscriptions outstanding this year I just ask those that get a reminder to get their subs paid ASAP.

A quip to start the new year

Details have been released regarding Britain's next generation of fighting Ships. The Royal Navy is proud of the cutting edge capability of the Fleet Of Type 45 destroyers. Costing £750 million, they have been designed to meet the needs of the 21st century. In addition to state of the art technology, weaponry, and guidance systems, the ships will comply with the very latest employment, equality, health and safety and human rights legislation.

They will be able to remain at sea for several months, and positively bristle with facilities. For instance, the new user friendly crew's nest comes equipped with wheelchair access. Live ammunition has been replaced with Paintballs, to reduce the risk of anyone getting hurt and to cut down on the number of compensation claims. Stress counselors and lawyers will be on duty 24 hours a day, and each ship will have its own onboard industrial Tribunal.

The crew will be 50/50 men and women, and balanced in accordance with the latest home office directives on race, gender, sexuality, and disability. Sailors will only have to work a maximum of 37 hours per week in line with Brussels Health and Safety rules, even in wartime. All bunks will be double occupancy, and destroyers will all come equipped with a maternity ward and creche situated on the same deck as the Gay Disco. Tobacco will be banned throughout the ship, but cannabis will be allowed in the mess.

The Royal Navy is anxious to shed its traditional reputation for "Rum, Sodomy, and the Lash". Out goes the Rum ration, which is to be replaced by Perrier Water., although sodomy remains and has been extended to include all ratings under 18. The lash will still be available, but only by request. Condoms can be obtained from the Bosun in a variety of flavours, except Capstan Full Strength.

Saluting officers has been abolished because it is elitist. It is to be replaced by the more informal "Hello Sailor" Daily Orders boards will be printed in 37 different languages, and braille. Crew members will no longer require permission to grow beards or moustaches, even the women.

The MOD is working on a new "Non specific" flag based on the controversial British Airways "Ethnic" tail fin design, because the White

Ensign is considered to be offensive to minorities. Sea Trials are expected to take place soon when the first of the new destroyers, HMS Cautious, sets out on her maiden mission, escorting boat loads of illegal immigrants across the Channel to ports on the South Coast. The ship is due to be launched soon in. A ceremony conducted by Captain Hook, from the Finsbury park Mosque, who will break a petrol bomb over the hull. The ship will slide gently into the water, to the tune of "In the Navy" by the Village People, played by the Band of the Royal Marines.

A Navy spokesperson said, "While the ship reflected the very latest of modern thinking, they were also capable of being up-graded to comply with any new legislation. He said, "Britain never, never waives the rules!
(I thought this Email I received would make you smile.) RP.

Many hotels are now advertising Friday to Sunday weekend breaks, and Monday to Friday midweek breaks, this does not help when looking for a hotel for a long weekend, Friday to Monday, so one has to start looking a lot earlier, at least a year ahead. I began looking for a hotel for our 2009 reunion last September. In October I had some correspondence with HMS Protector's reunion organiser, they have such a huge members list they have to hold 3 reunions a year to accommodate all their members.

Their 3rd 2007 reunion was in September at a hotel in Eastbourne, managed by an ex RN person. The hotel was highly recommended for a ships reunion by the Protector organiser who has reserved it again for their September 2009 reunion. I have made a preliminary reservation for the hotel from Friday 15th May to Monday 18th May 2009.

We shall be visiting the hotel late April to sort out details, which I hope to present at the 2008 AGM.

I reckon this was the quietest Christmas and New Year we have ever had at home. No Callers, No Carol singers, no drunken yobs singing their way home in the early hours, and very little fireworks. Even driving down town to fetch the morning paper one did not have to steer round the broken bottles or glasses. It is raining now and the sky is overcast, the wind has died off and it is quite warm out, but I am staying in racking my brains out for something to fill the newsletter with, so be prepared.

With Christmas and The New Year now in the past tense I thought I would make a return to Dec 24th, not 2007! but but 93 years earlier, 1914.

You are standing up to your knees in the slime of a waterlogged trench. It is the evening of 24th December 1914 and you are on the dreaded Western Front. Stooped over, you wade across to the firing step and take over the watch, pleasantries exchanged, your bleary-eyed mud-splattered colleague shuffles off to his dug out. Despite the horrors and hardships, your morale is high in your belief that in the New Year nations army march towards a glorious victory.

But for now you stamp your feet in a vain attempt to keep warm. All is quiet when jovial voices call out from both friendly and enemy trenches. Then the men the men from both sides start singing carols and songs. Next come requests not to fire, and soon the unthinkable happens: you start to see shadowy figures gathering together in no-mans land laughing, and joking and sharing gifts. Many have exchanged cigarettes, the lit ends burning brightly in the inky darkness. Plucking up courage you hurl yourself out of the trench and walk towards the foe...

The meeting of enemies as friends in no-mans land was experienced by thousands of men on the Western Front during Christmas 1914. Today 93 years after it occurred, the event is seen as a shining episode of sanity from among the bloody chapters of World War One - a spontaneous effort by the lower ranks to create a peace that could have blossomed were it not for the interference of the generals and politicians.

The reality of the Christmas Truce however, is a slightly less romantic and a more down to earth story. It was an affair that in some spots hardly got a mention, but in others left a profound impact upon those who took part. Many accounts were rushed, confused, or contradictory. Others, written after the event, are weighed down by hind sight. These difficulties aside, the true story is still striking precisely because of its rag-tagged nature: it is more 'human' and therefore all the more potent. Months beforehand, millions of servicemen, reservists and volunteers from all over the continent had rushed enthusiastically to the banners of war: the atmosphere was one more of holiday rather than conflict.

But it was not long before the jovial facade was torn away.

Armies were equipped with repeating rifles, machine-guns and a vast array of artillery tore chunks out of each other, and thousands upon thousands of men perished. To protect against the threat of this firepower, the soldiers were ordered to dig in and prepare for next year's offensives, which most men believed would break the deadlock and deliver victory.

The early trenches were often hasty creations and poorly constructed' if the trench was badly sighted it could become a sniping hot spot. In bad weather (the winter of 1914 was a dire one) the positions could flood and cave in.. The soldiers - unequipped to face the rigours of the cold and rain - found themselves wallowing in a freezing mire of muddy slime and the decaying bodies of the fallen.

The men at the front could not help but have a degree of sympathy for his opponents who were having just as miserable a time as they were. Another factor that broke down the animosity between the opposing armies were the surroundings, In 1914 the men at the front could still see vestiges of civilisation. Villages, although smashed up, were still standing, fields, although pitted with shell-holes, had not been turned into muddy land- scapes. It was the combination of these factors and many more minor ones, that made the Christmas Truce of 1914 possible. On the eve of the truce the British Army was manning a stretch of the line running south from the infamous Ypres salient for 27 miles to the La Basse Canal.

Along the front the enemy was sometimes no more than 70,50 or even 30 yards away. Both Tommy and Fritz could hurl greetings and insults at each other, and, importantly, came the tacit agreement not to shoot. Incidents of temporary truces and outright fraternisation were more common at this stage of the war than anyone today realises - even units that had just taken part in a series of futile and costly assaults were still willing to talk and come to agreements with their opponents.

As Christmas approached the festive mood and the desire for a lull in the fighting increased as parcels packed with goodies started to arrive from home. On top of this came gifts 'care of the state'. Tommy received plum puddings and 'Princess Mary boxes'; a metal case engraved with her outline and filled with chocolates and butterscotch, cigarettes and tobacco, a

picture card of Princess Mary and a facsimile of George V's greeting to the troops. "May God protect you and bring you safely home", it said.

Not to be outdone, Fritz received a present from the Kaiser, the *Kaiserliche*, a large meerschaum pipe for the troops and a box of cigars for NCOs and officers. Towns, Villages, Cities and numerous organisations on both sides also flooded the front with gifts of food, warm clothes and letters of thanks. The Belgians and French also received goods, although not in such an organised fashion as the British and Germans. For these nations the Christmas of 1914 was tinged with sadness, their countries were occupied. It is no wonder that the truce never really caught hold here as it did in the British sector. With their morale boosted by messages of thanks and their bellies fuller than normal, and with so much Christmas booty still to hand, the season of goodwill entered the trenches. The British Daily Telegraph correspondent wrote that on one part of the line the Germans had managed to slip a chocolate cake into the British trenches. Even more amazingly it was accompanied with a message asking for a cease fire later that evening so they could celebrate the festive season and their Captain's birthday. The proposed a concert at 7.30pm when candles would be lit and placed on the trench parapets.

The British accepted the invitation and offered some tobacco as a return present. That evening, at the stated time German heads suddenly popped up and started to sing. Each number finished with a round of applause from both sides. The Germans then asked the British to join in. At this point one mean spirited Tommy shouted: "We'd rather die than sing in German". To which a German Joked aloud: "It would kill us if you did".

December 24th was a good day weather-wise: the rain had given way to clear skies. On many stretches of the Front the crack of rifle fire and the dull thud of shells ploughing into the ground continued, but at a far lighter level that was broken by the singing and shouting drifting over, in the main, the German trenches. Along many parts of the line the truce was spurred on with the arrival in the German trenches of miniature Christmas trees decorated with lit candles strung along the trench parapets captured the Tommies imagination. It was the perfect excuse for opponents to start singing and in some areas to pluck up courage to meet one another in no-mans-land. The

British high command - comfortably 'entrenched' in a luxurious chateaux 27 miles behind the Front- was beginning to hear of the fraternisation. Stern orders were issued by the commander of the BEF, Sir John French against such behaviour, other 'brass-hats' also made grave pronouncements on the dangers and consequences of parleying with the Germans.

However there were many high-ranking officers who took a surprisingly relaxed view of the situation. If anything, they believed it would at least offer their men the chance to strengthen their trenches. This mixed stance mean very few officers and men involved in the Christmas Truce were disciplined. The German High-Command's ambivalent attitude towards the Truce Mirrored that of the British. Christmas Day began quietly, but once the sun was up fraternisation began, songs were sung and rations were thrown to one another, troops and officers took matters into their own hands and ventured forth into no-mans-land which became a virtual playground. Men exchanged gifts and buttons. In one or two places barbers gave free hair cuts. One German, a juggler gave an impromptu performance of his routine in the middle of no-mans-land. Scots and Huns were fraternising in the most genuine possible manner, every sort of souvenir was exchanged, addresses given and received, photos of families shown, etc.

One British fellow offered a German a cigarette; the German said "Virginian?" our fellow replied "Aye, straight-cut", the German said "No thanks, I only smoke Turkish" it gave us all a laugh. On many parts of the line the truce was initiated through sadder means. Both sides saw the lull as a chance to get into no-mans -land and seek out the bodies of their compatriots and to give them a decent burial, once this was done the opponents would inevitably begin talking to one another.

With the truce in full swing up and down the line their were a number of recorded games of soccer, just "kick-about's" rather than a proper match. But on January 1st, 1915, The London *Times* Published a letter from a Major in the Medical Corp reporting that in his sector the British played a game against the Germans and were beaten 3-2. Kurt Zehmisch if the 134 th Saxons recorded in his diary: ' The English brought a soccer ball and pretty soon a lively game ensued. It was wonder-

ful, yet how strange it was. The English officers felt the same way about it. Thus Christmas, the celebration of love managed to bring mortal enemies together as friends for a short time.

The truce lasted all day; in places it ended that night, but on other sections of the line it held over Boxing Day, and in some areas, for a few more days. In fact there were parts of the front where the absence of aggressive behaviour was conspicuous well into 1915.

Captain J C Dunn, the Medical Officer in the Royal Welch Fusiliers, whose unit had fraternised and received two barrels of beer from the Saxon troops opposite, recorded how hostilities re-started on his section of the front. Dunn wrote: ‘At 0830 I fired three shots into the air and put up a flag with “Merry Christmas” on it and climbed onto the parapet. The Germans put up a sheet with “Thank You” on it, and the German Captain appeared on the parapet. We both bowed and saluted and got down into our respective trenches, and he fired two shots into the air, and the War was on again’. The war was indeed on again, for there was no hope of continuing the truce. Despite being widely reported in Britain and to a lesser extent in Germany, the troops and the populations of both countries were still keen to prosecute the conflict.

In the public mind the facts have become irrevocably mythologized, and perhaps this is the most important legacy of the Christmas Truce today. In our age of uncertainty, it is comforting to believe, regardless of the real reasoning and motives, that soldiers and officers told to hate, loathe and kill, could still lower their guns and extend the hand of goodwill, peace, love and Christmas cheer.

Reunion 2008:

We were able to extend the date for reserving a room at the hotel, this date is now passed, but that does not mean you cannot reserve a room. Reservations are open until well into April so send in your form and £25 pp deposit ASAP. The Full payment must be paid by April 23rd. You can make smaller payments towards the full amount if you wish. Please make all cheque's and Postal Orders payments payable to:
HMS Phoebe Association (and not to the hotel or Treasurer).

Entertainment is arranged for Friday and Saturday

Friday night Entertainment will be a Keyboard/Vocalist, we had this person at the HMS Sheffield reunion and found him to be very good.

On Saturday night it will be someone recommended by a Coventry ship-mate. This entertainer (front cover) does a Neil Diamond show and won the New Faces TV venue, he has enjoyed considerable success abroad and chart success with Polydor Records. He can also perform hits from the 60s/70s, Soul and 30 minutes of solid Rock & Roll. I'm hoping he's as good as it reads?? The itinerary for the weekend has been changed due to costs.

The Saturday coach trip to Birmingham City Centre is still on, but the AGM will be held AM on Sunday. The Sunday coach trip to Stratford & Warwick is cancelled. Padre Ray will hold a prayer meeting am. The Finger Buffet for Sunday Lunch time is still on, and at 7 PM it's a Carvery dinner.

STRATEGIC PERFECTION ..

The U.S.S. Constitution (Old Ironsides) as a combat vessel carried 48,600 gallons of fresh water for her crew of 475 officers and men.

This was sufficient to last six months of sustained operations at sea.

She carried no evaporators (fresh water distillers). However, let it be noted that according to her log, "On July 27, 1798, the U.S.S. Constitution sailed from Boston with a full complement of 475 officers and men, 48,600 gallons of fresh water, 7,400 cannon shot, 11,600 pounds of black powder and 79,400 gallons of rum." Her mission:

"To destroy and harass English shipping."

Making Jamaica on 6 October, she took on 826 pounds of flour and 68,300 gallons of rum. Then she headed for the Azores, arriving there 12 November. She provisioned with 550 pounds of beef and 64,300 gallons of Portuguese wine. On 18 November, she set sail for England.

In the ensuing days she defeated five British men-of-war and captured and scuttled 12 English merchantmen, salvaging only the rum aboard each.

By 26 January, her powder and shot were exhausted. Nevertheless, and though unarmed, she made a night raid up the Firth of Clyde in Scotland.

Her landing party captured a whiskey distillery and transferred 40,000 gallons of single malt Scotch aboard by dawn. Then she headed home.....

The U.S.S. Constitution arrived back in Boston on 20 February 1799, **with No cannon shot, No food, No powder, NO rum, NO wine, NO whiskey and 38,600 gallons of stagnant water.** GO NAVY!

(No wonder the yanks became dry ships full of milk- bars)

A ventriloquist visiting Australia walks into a small outback village and sees a local sitting on his porch patting his dog. He figures he'll have a little fun, so he says to the Aussie: "Hey, mind if I talk to your dog?"

Aussie: "The dog doesn't talk, stupid!"

Ventriloquist: "Hello dog, how's it going mate?"

Dog: "Doin' all right."

Aussie: (look of extreme shock) Ventriloquist: "Is this your owner?" (pointing at the villager)

Dog: "Yep"

Ventriloquist: "How does he treat you?"

Dog: "Real good. He walks me twice a day, feeds me great food and takes me to the creek once a week to play. "

Aussie: (look of utter disbelief)

Ventriloquist: "Mind if I talk to your horse? "

Aussie: "Uh, the horse doesn't talk either... I think. "

Ventriloquist: "Hey horse, how's it going?"

Horse: "Cool"

Aussie: (absolutely dumbfounded)

Ventriloquist: "Is this your owner?" (pointing at the villager)

Horse: "Yep"

Ventriloquist: How does he treat you?

Horse: "Pretty good, thanks for asking. He rides me regularly, brushes me down often and keeps me in the barn to protect me from the elements in the winter.

Aussie: (total look of amazement)

Ventriloquist: "Mind if I talk to your sheep?"

Sweating Aussie: (in a panic) "The sheep's a bloody liar!"

Received From S/ Bob Hobbs

Obituary

**I regret to inform you that shipmates Abe Carolan and Morris Sampson have 'crossed the bar'. S/m Abe Carolan passed away a few days before Christmas. S/m Morris Sampson died suddenly of a coronary 9th January.
Our Condolence and sympathy to both families.**

S/m R Stevens & S/m T Hendy have been removed from the association in accordance with Section III 4.2 (amendment) of the Constitution.
(Ref: Non payment of subscriptions. 4 years).

Associated member David Bateman has resigned following the death of his uncle S/m Jack Potter.

I would like to take this opportunity in wishing everyone well and hope none of you have been unlucky enough to have caught the latest virus. Be careful of what medicines you buy, make sure they do not have any effect on medicines you already take, to be sure ask the Pharmacist.

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We still have members with outstanding subscriptions, mostly for this year 2007/2008, but also a few for other years. ARE YOU ONE OF THEM?

Wanted: Your stories for the newsletter, any subject. If any of you have spare photos of our reunions can I have them, I am putting photos on the Phoebe web site and I seem to be running out of reunion ones, please pencil on the back which reunion it is.

I have a request for a small cruiser plaque, a baby, whose grandfather served aboard the cruiser and spoke so highly of the Phoebe, is to be named after the ship, and her father has asked if I know where he can get one, I thought this may be an idea for the association to get one and present it to the father for his daughters Christening. I have a small plaque which may suffice but requires a overhaul. I will give it a go, unless anyone has one