



AHOY SHIPMATE

RNA Torbay Newsletter

Volume 4

Issue 2

March 2015

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Yorkshire jokes

Police have just released details of a new drug craze that is being carried out in Yorkshire nightclubs. Apparently, Yorkshire club goers have started injecting Ecstasy just above their front teeth.

Police say the dangerous practice is called "e by gum"

A Yorkshire man takes his cat to the vet.

Yorkshireman: "Ayup, lad, I need to talk to thee about me cat."

Vet: "Is it a tom?"

Yorkshireman: "Nay, I've browt it with us."

A Yorkshireman's dog dies and as it was a favourite pet he decides to have a gold statue made by a jeweller to remember the dog by.

Yorkshireman: "Can tha mek us a gold statue of yon dog?"

Jeweller: "Do you want it 18 carat?"

Yorkshireman: "No I want it chewin' a bone yer daft bugger!"

Editorial

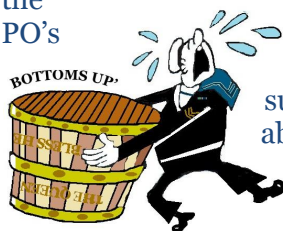
By Shipmate Norrie Millen

Hi! Shipmates,



I had one of our readers challenge the "A standard naval tot of rum" anecdote in last issue stating that I was wrong to say that rum was issued at aged 20. The person, who shall remain nameless, said on his ship they were issued their first tot at age 18 and not 20. I knew that in my time it was definitely 20 and all the research I have done since the challenge; indicates that rum was never issued before the age of 20 (except in some very rare and extenuating circumstances). However this person was adamant that he had his first tot at 18 and said that he had checked with three of his shipmate's, all of whom confirmed they had been issued their tots at 18. Well I am not convinced and can only think the ship concerned made up their own rules, in any event I have sent off a question to Navy News which should bring some interesting answers.

Now I know the rules were 'bent' on occasions, due to water shortage, so on some small ships; minesweepers, minehunters etc. often it was one & one as opposed to the official two & one. Likewise when I was PO's



Messman I had the perks of having a neat tot, and I think most Messman did. I am sure you all have many dits on rum and its abuses, so come on Shipmates, sharpen up those quills, dust off your grey cells and fire them in for us all to share.

A good navy newsletter is only as good as the shipmates who support it by sending in their anecdotes, I am sure you all have at least one

The way I see it anyway!



Welcome Aboard

Please welcome aboard our newest branch shipmate and certainly the farthest away – Steve Jackson (Chief Petty Officer 'Scabliker' USN Retired) who lives in Bremerton, Washington State USA



Chairman's Corner

By Shipmate John Soanes

Did you know?

The greatest and most frightful tragedy of all to befall Devonport Royal Dockyard occurred on the 22nd September 1796. The frigate *AMPHION*, Captain, Israel Pellew, was lying in the Hamoaze and was under sealed orders to depart on a special mission; a leave-taking party was in progress and there were gathered aboard over one hundred visitors, men, women and children besides crew.

In a flash the happy and joyful scene was transformed into a ghastly holocaust as the ship disintegrated in a vast explosion which left little more than wreckage, three hundred souls perished in this shocking catastrophe and only about a dozen survived.

In a later Court of Inquiry, evidence was heard that only a short time previously the ship's gunner had been caught smuggling gunpowder ashore to sell and that a bag of gunpowder had been found disguised as a package of biscuits ready for taking ashore. On the day prior to the explosion he was reported to have been drunk and it is believed in his careless state, he had probably spilled gunpowder near the forward magazine which had accidentally ignited and set off the magazine itself. This was never proven. The survivors included Captain Israel Pellew who went on to command a ship at the Battle of Trafalgar and ended up at the end of the Napoleonic wars as a Rear Admiral. It seems he had been dining in his cabin with the Captain of another ship and his First Lieutenant, when the explosion threw him about a bit, he managed to reach the cabin window when a second explosion blew him through the window into the water, whence he was rescued. Other survivors included two lieutenants, a boatswain three or four seaman and a woman and child.

To matters more local and up to date, by the time this newsletter is circulated, we will have enjoyed an hour or two on March 6th in the company of members of the Communications Association at the RAFA

Club. And we will be looking forward to our first quiz night of the year on April 30th. Don't forget to bring some prizes for the raffle.

Eds Note: Three ships were going to be named after Captain Israel Pellew or Captain Sir Edward Pellew, later Viscount Admiral Sir Edward Pellew, and 1st Viscount Exmouth, but second one was renamed *Carysfort* before launch. Pellew (F62) Blackwood Class was Teignmouth's adopted ship until decommissioned in 1971; which reminds me of an amusing anecdote for another issue. Look out for 'Stuffed shirt attitude'.



Right at the end of a programme recently, there was a discussion about the cost of entry into Premiership football matches where ticket prices of £60 or £100 per game is not uncommon.

An elderly chap being interviewed said he could recall many years ago arriving at the turnstiles when the attendant greeted him with: "That will be ten quid, mate".

"What?!" the old chap said, "I could get a woman for that!"

Without batting an eyelid, the fellow on the turnstile retorted, "Not for 45 minutes each way with a brass band and a meat pie in the interval, you wouldn't!"

RNA TORBAY PRESIDENT'S ANNUAL REPORT.

Submitted by Shipmate Peter Brown - President

Once again the 2014 Year started with our Festive Lunch in the Redcliffe Hotel, Paignton, where we were joined by members from RNA Newton Abbot and a few guests from RMA Torbay. It is always a pleasure to see old friends from these Branches and they appear to enjoy coming to this venue overlooking Torbay.

In February, 2013, an Armed Forces Committee was formed by South Devon College, with a view to planning the events to take place in 2014, commemorating the 70th Anniversary of the D-Day Landings in Normandy. The following programme was drawn up:-

Friday, 6th June, D-Day:

At 11 am a quiet service held at the memorials on the wall by the Harvester Pub, Beacon Quay, for Normandy Veterans Association members only and there was no Parade.

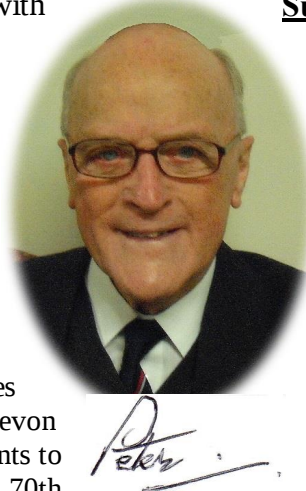
Saturday, 7th June:

The main parade led by the Royal Marines Band, Plymouth, and including our Branch Standard and some of our Shipmates marched along Beacon to the area in front of the Harvester Pub, where the service was held. There followed a Lunch for 208 members who had taken part in the Parade.

Sunday, 8th June:

A Sail Past of some 80 craft from Yacht and Sailing Clubs around Torbay, took place starting at 2:00 pm. Members of the Normandy Veterans Association, including a few who had actually landed on the Normandy Beaches in 1944 accompanied by 8 of our members amongst various other guests, boarded a WW2 Fairmile Launch. The fleet of craft divided into Red, White and Blue Flotillas and led by *HMS Pembroke*, sailed past the *Fairmile* and saluted or cheered the Normandy Veterans. It was an emotional and exciting experience for all concerned.

In this year 2015 there are a number of further Anniversaries and the Armed Forces Commemoration Committee is currently planning for each one of these:-



Sunday, 10th May:

70th Anniversary of VE Day. 75th Anniversary of Dunkirk Evacuation. Service to be held in Torre Abbey Grounds by the Dunkirk Memorial Stone.

Wednesday, 20th MAY:

Freedom of Torbay granted to *HM S/M Torbay*. Members of her Boats Crew are to march from Torquay Town Hall down Union Street the Strand and Victoria Parade to Beacon Quay.

Saturday, 6th June:

10:30 am Normandy Veterans Club Annual D-Day Parade and Service at Beacon Quay. There will then be the unveiling of a new Brass Tablet mounted on a large concrete plinth at the entrance to Beacon Quay. This will explain the meaning of the M Morse Code message "Vanishing Point" sunk in the boarding walkway along the length of Beacon Quay. Following these events at Beacon Quay it is intended to hold a lunch at Livermead House Hotel at 1:00 pm. Those present including the N VC members will assemble on Corbyn Head to take the salute from another Sail Past at 3:00 pm.

Saturday, 15th August:

Commemoration of the 70th Anniversary of VJ Day. Programme. To be advised in due course.

Returning to 2014, we celebrated our Branch Trafalgar Dinner once again at Livermead House Hotel and were pleased to welcome our Patron Captain Wreford-Brown with us. Unfortunately the attendance was much reduced. This leads me to consider whether the time may have come for us to get together with our neighbouring RNA Branches in Brixham and Newton Abbot and the RMA Torbay Branch and assemble at an agreed venue and date in October. The venue could be static in either Livermead House Hotel or the Redcliffe Hotel or if preferred, placed on a rotating basis between the three RNA Branches.

I do suggest that we give this proposal serious consideration for the Trafalgar Dinner or maybe a Lunch in the same way as we have done for the Festive Lunch in January each year.

In conclusion, I would like to wish you all A Happy and Healthy New Year and may we continue to flourish as a successful RNA Branch.

China Fleet Club - The War Years

Thanks to Ken Jones (HMS Tenby Association) & with permission from Russ Graystone (RAN www.gunplot.net)

THE CLUB CARRIED on and although turnover was somewhat reduced, it showed a profit for 1939, 1940 and 1941.

1940 brought rumours closer to home, this time of increased Japanese war activity in the Far East, and on 1st July 1940 British women and children in Hong Kong were evacuated.

The following twelve months saw Hong Kong preparing for war. The China Fleet Club was selected as the first Headquarters for the Royal Navy, being required to accommodate the Officer's and Ship's Company of H.M.S. "Tamar" at the first sign of hostilities.

The Chinese Compradore was instructed to purchase, and maintain, a three months' supply of foodstuffs, and to keep this stock in reserve against emergencies.

The rumours became reality when Japan declared war on 8th December and Hong Kong was brought into the conflict. The Club Manager was informed at 5.15 that morning that England was at war with Japan and War Operations Orders went into immediate effect.

All Service ratings on shore leave were cleared from the Club so that the Officer's and Ship's Companies of H.M.S. Tamar could move in. Orders were also received to prepare accommodation for R.N.R., R.N.V.R., and H.K.R.N.V.R. Officers and ratings and an unknown number of Chinese.

Further orders stated that all Officers and Men in uniform, civilians attached to naval establishments and Chinese ratings who reported at the Club were to be accommodated and fed. All meals were to be supplied by the Club's Compradore under the instructions of the Manager.

By 7.30 on the evening of 8th December 1941, the China Fleet Club was on a war

footing. Everything had gone according to plan.

At approximately 8 a.m. on 8th December, the Japanese started air raids on Hong Kong, at Kai Tak, and in the harbour ships were attacked from the air. Bombs were dropped in the harbour but the Club suffered no damage on that first day.

The Ship's Company of H.M.S. Tamar moved into the Club according to plan, and the Officers occupied the billets allocated to them. The following shows the number of Officers, Men and Chinese accommodated and fed in the Club from 8th December to 11th December 1941, both days inclusive:

8th December	1941 Officers & Men	250
9th December	1941 Officers & Men	287
10th December	1941 Men - 265 Chinese	120
11th December	1941 Men - 277 Chinese	154

On 10th December 1941, the Wardroom Officers' Messman, Ah Choy, took over the victualling of the Officers, sharing the Club's Kitchen and utensils with the Compradore.

During the next few days the Colony was subjected to intense aerial bombing, and long-range shelling from land and sea, but the Club remained undamaged.

On the morning of 9th December, two lighters arrived at the Pier outside the Club and were loaded with beer, wines, spirits, bedding and part of the three months' reserve of foodstuffs from the Compradore's stores. These supplies were then taken to Aberdeen and placed in the Aberdeen Industrial School, where a branch of the China Fleet Club had been established, in the temporary charge of Petty Officer William Thynne, the Assistant Manager of the Club.

On the morning of Thursday 11th December 1941, the British position on



the Mainland had become precarious, and it was decided to evacuate all the remaining troops to the Island of Hong Kong. By this time, the Club had come into the danger zone to such an extent that it was decided to evacuate Officers and Men to Aberdeen, and this operation was completed by 5 p.m. on Thursday 11th December. That night, the Manager of the Club received orders to report to the Aberdeen Industrial School to attend a conference regarding the maintenance of China Fleet Club supplies for the Officers and Men then billeted in the School. On returning to the Club on Friday morning, 12th December, he found that the Leading Seaman's Bar had been broken open and completely looted, while the Manager's Quarters and Office had also been broken into and ransacked. A report was immediately made to the Commodore Hong Kong, and the Commissioner of Police, the latter sending two detectives to the Club to investigate.

During the next few days, the Engineers' Shop and Carpenters' Shop were transferred to Aberdeen and, following an urgent request for beds and bedding and other stores, the following were sent to Aberdeen Industrial School from the Club: - 400 mattresses; 800 sheets; 800 pillows 1,000 blankets; 800 counterpanes; 1,000 towels 1,600 pillowslips; 50 rattan chairs; and a further consignment of beer, wines, spirits, and cigarettes. These stores were transferred by lorry, the Manager of the Club making daily trips to and from Aberdeen.

After the evacuation of Service personnel to Aberdeen, the Club became the Centre for the accommodation of troops manning the pillboxes on the Praya, drawn from the Middlesex, Royal Scots, Indian and Portuguese Regiments.

In addition, Naval and Army personnel were supplied with meals at all times of the day and night during the Battle of Hong Kong and accommodation was also given to crews landed from disabled ships, and ships sunk in the vicinity of Hong Kong. It should be noted that at least 8 per cent of the Chinese Staff remained loyal to the Club until 22nd

December, but as the position was then desperate, they left to seek safety elsewhere. As far as possible, the "boys" were paid half-a-month's pay before leaving the Club.

During the actual Battle of Hong Kong, the Club received a direct hit, a 6-inch shell penetrating the main wall of the Reading Room on the Ground Floor, passing through two more walls, and landing outside the Leading Seaman's Bar! But luckily it failed to explode. The markings on the shell bore the date 1941 and showed that it was of British manufacture. The south side of the Club also suffered slight damage when a small bomb hit the parapet on the roof, and tore away water and sanitary pipes. Another shell passed through the parapet wall of the Theatre roof on the East side, and here again the shell failed to explode.

The last visit paid to the Club by the Manager during the Battle was on 23rd December 1941, when further supplies were transferred to Aberdeen.

The Branch of the Club at Aberdeen Industrial School functioned throughout the Battle of Hong Kong and was the Distributing Centre whence beer, wines, spirits and cigarettes were supplied to the Naval Craft operating in the vicinity of Aberdeen and Repulse Bay. The Bar was kept open and drinks and cigarettes were supplied to all Naval and Army personnel accommodated in the Industrial School, and to all personnel who came down from the firing lines for rest periods. The Assistant Manager of the Club was detailed to join a fighting unit, but shortly afterwards was sent to Queen Mary Hospital where he remained for some months.

During the last week of the Battle of Hong Kong, the Industrial School was evacuated by nearly all fighting forces, who retired to the hills, but a great many returned to the School within 48 hours. By this time The Japanese were occupying Repulse Bay.

On 25th December 1941, orders were received at Aberdeen to "Cease fire - retain all guns and ammunition", followed by a further order to "Return all guns and

ammunition to store". The Battle of Hong Kong was over - His Excellency The Governor of Hong Kong had surrendered the Colony to the Japanese Military Forces.

THE OCCUPATION

AT 6 P.M. ON 25th December, the Manager of the Club was ordered to destroy all Beer, Wines and Spirits - the property of the Club at Aberdeen, and from that hour until 6 a.m. of 26th December, the following stocks were destroyed:-

500 Cases Beer	(48 bottles per case)
75 Cases Brandy	(12 bottles per case)
75 Cases Whisky	(12 bottles per case)
100 Cases Gin	(12 bottles per case)
75 Cases Sherry	(12 bottles per case)
70 Cases Rum	(12 bottles per case)

Also, about 50,000 cigarettes were sent out to the British and Canadian Forces at Aberdeen.

With the exception of a small party, all Service personnel were transferred to the Royal Naval Dockyard, Hong Kong, as Prisoners-of-War.

On 27th December 1941, the Japanese stated that the naval prisoners-of-war could be accommodated in the China Fleet Club, and the Manager was sent to the Club to arrange for their accommodation, but was refused admittance by the Japanese Military Forces who, in the meantime, had taken over the Club. Just then, five Lorries filled with Chinese women arrived under Japanese escort outside the Club. These women had been collected by the Japanese and were put into the Club to work for them.

After six months had elapsed the Japanese Military Forces evacuated the Club, and the Japanese Naval Authorities took over control. Naval Officers and men of the Japanese Navy were accommodated in the Club until the British Navy re-occupied Hong Kong in August 1945.

The Theatre of the Club was used chiefly as a School for Japanese Naval Officers,

and the Restaurant was re-opened under Japanese control to cater for the needs of the Japanese residents of Wanchai.

During one period of the Occupation, all brass materials were stripped from the Club by the Japanese, and extensive looting of Club property took place.

The Club suffered very little damage during the bombing raids on Hong Kong by Allied Forces.

When the re-occupying Forces entered Hong Kong Harbour on 30th August 1945, they found the Club still standing. The China Fleet Club had a reputation amongst naval personnel, and for those who were seeing it for the first time it must have caused considerable interest. For those who had served on the China Station and had known the Club before the war, it meant that the Club could again be used and raised their hopes of its early restoration.

From a closer inspection of the Club, little structural damage appeared to have been done. Only two shell holes could be seen but there were many broken windows. Also, the floors of the Club were exceedingly dirty and the ranges in the kitchen were broken. Meanwhile little could be done to the Club and its future had not yet been decided, the building was entrusted to H.M.S. "Vengeance" - Captain D.M.L. Neame, I D.S.O., R.N.

[Next issue- China Fleet Club - The Post War Years](#)

A STREET CAT NAMED BOB



Englishman James Bowen had an unsettled upbringing. He was diagnosed with ADHD, schizophrenia and manic depression.

He was 18 years old and lived on the street or in shelters. James's life revolved around his heroin addiction and busking on the streets of London.

In early 2007, James was enrolled in a Methadone program and living in sheltered accommodation when he found a ginger tom cat.

He discovered a wound on the cat's leg and took it to the vet. And so James adopted the cat, who he named Bob.

Together they have become celebrities.

It began when Bob started following James everywhere. He joined James busking on the street and James's income rapidly increased.

He began to attract more and more attention. Tourists would visit his spot just to see the cat, who was happy to dress up and sit still.



They went everywhere together on foot.

And on public transport.

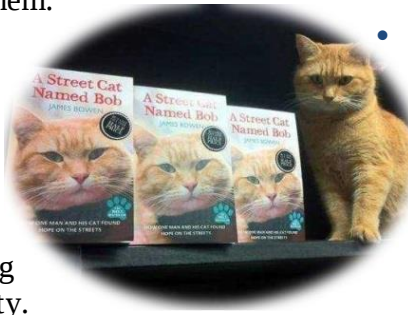
You Tube videos appeared and newspapers got hold of the story. This led to a publishing agreement and James started writing about his experiences with Bob on the streets of London. Apart from 'A Street Cat Named Bob' and 'The World According To Bob'.

A number of books for children have also been written. Sold worldwide, James' life has improved. Together they have become celebrities. And their teamwork is certainly causing a stir.

The books have been translated into numerous languages. More than a million have been sold.

There's also news that a movie will be made about the two of them.

Still living in London, James still loves busking and a healthy looking Bob goes too, efficiently taking care of the publicity.



A lovely good news story!



Cooks to the Galley

Norrie's Bread & Butter Pudding

Ingredients

- ✓ 2 oz / 50g soft butter
- ✓ 10 slices white /fruit bread, cut diagonally across.
- ✓ 2 oz / 50g golden raisins/sultanas
- ✓ ¼ tsp grated nutmeg
- ✓ ¼ tsp cinnamon
- ✓ 12 fl oz / 350 ml milk
- ✓ 2 fl oz / 50 ml custard
- ✓ 2 large free-range eggs
- ✓ 1 oz / 25g sugar
- ✓ 1 tsp vanilla extract

Preparation:

Heat the oven 355°F/180°C/Gas 4.

- Grease a 2 pint/1 litre pie dish with a little of the butter. Spread each of the bread triangles with butter.
- Cover the base of the pie dish with overlapping triangles of bread, butter side up. Sprinkle half the golden raisins/sultanas evenly over the bread, then lightly sprinkle with a little nutmeg and cinnamon. Repeat this layer one more time or until the dish is filled, finishing with the raisins on top.
- In a saucepan gently heat the milk and cream - DO NOT BOIL.
- In a large baking bowl beat the eggs with 3/4 sugar and the vanilla extract until light and airy and pale in colour. Pour the warm milk over the eggs and continue beating until all the milk is added.
- Pour the egg mixture slowly and evenly over the bread until all the liquid is added. Gently press the surface with your hand to push the bread into the liquid. Sprinkle the remaining sugar over the surface then leave to one side for 30 mins.
- Bake the pudding in the hot oven for 40 - 45 mins, until the surface is golden brown and the pudding well risen and the egg is set. Serve hot.

Bread and Butter Pudding reheats well covered with aluminium foil in a hot oven, I also love it cold cut into large wedges - perfect for a lunch box.

Looking for your recipes now!

MY FINEST TOT OF PUSSEY'S RUM

By J.N Thwaite (Ex - Bunting Tosser Royal Navy)

Adapted by Shipmate Norrie Millen

This anecdote extracted from one of the first Ahoy's I produced for RNA Southern Ontario when we had a bottle rum to give away

As an old and ancient rum rat I feel that I ought to have at the chance of winning the bottle of Pussey's. What tale shall I tell out of so many? Of the day Princess Anne was born; the downfall of the British matelot when the Italian submariners drew their rum; or how we fiddled "*Jago's*" fool proof rum bar?

I think I will be serious and relate the tale of my most memorable tot and the one that certainly tasted the best.

It was the year 1942, I was an ordinary Signalman serving aboard the finest ship in the Royal Navy - *HMS Edinburgh*, wearing the flag of Vice-Admiral *Bonham-Carter*, as C.S.18 on Russian convoy duty. We had escorted a convoy to Kola Inlet in North Russia and were on the returning homeward leg escorting convoy QP12.

At 1530 on 30th April, some 200 miles north of Murmansk, in the Barents Sea, having moved away from the convoy and the safety of the destroyer escort, we were torpedoed twice by a German submarine. One torpedo blowing fifty foot off of our stern, the other hitting below the Topmen's mess on the starboard side.

I was in the Signalmen's mess, part of a large messdeck amidships which also accommodated the Royal Marines, when the torpedo struck. The mess table, stool and cup of tea I was drinking disappeared. The lights went out and the emergency lights flickered on, however surprisingly there was no panic.

I grabbed my lifebelt, seaboots and oilskin and made my way to the flag deck. The upper deck was a complete shambles. Many of my shipmates had been killed or injured. Some were covered in oil from the fuel tanks breached by the torpedo which had struck below the messdeck.

With only one screw turning, we managed to keep underway, until we were joined by the destroyers *HMS Foresight* and *Forester* and two Russian destroyers. Bulkheads were shored up by the damage control parties. The wounded were taken to a temporary hospital which had been set up in the wardroom.

On the flag deck the weather was bitterly cold, with heavy snow squalls occurring one after the other.

One of the destroyers was acting as our rudder, keeping our head on course, whilst we painfully struggled to maintain four knots headway and attempted to reach Murmansk. Early the next morning the Russian destroyers departed and were replaced by HM Minesweepers *Gossamer*, *Harrier* and *Hussar*.

As our galleys were completely out of action, a temporary galley was set up in the officer's bathroom. The cooks worked miracles, providing hot drinks, soup and sandwiches to sustain us.

The '*buntings*' and '*sparkers*' had commandeered a steel cabinet on the hanger roof, which normally housed Meteorological balloons. It was filled with spare bunting and used as a refuge between watches. It was a trifle cold but at least we were sheltered from the extreme weather conditions.

All that night we could hear the bulkheads creaking and groaning under the pressure of the sea. Occasionally a deep rumble as a bulkhead collapsed. We had great faith in our ship and knew we would stay afloat... at least we hoped.

At approximately 0730 on the morning of May 2nd, three large German destroyers appeared on the scene. Our two escorts, much smaller destroyers than the enemy, went in to break up the attack. Although receiving heavy punishment they succeeded in sinking one and driving off another.

The *Edinburgh* with only one turret operational engaged the third destroyer and managed to hit and mortally damage it. However the German still managed to fire her torpedoes, one of which struck us on the port side just abaft of the aircraft catapult, almost breaking us in two.

We were carrying many wounded seaman from ships sunk or badly damaged on their way to Russia. ð ..*Continued on page 12*

Naval Hospital Bremerton staff members share their 'Unwavering Strength' for a New Year, New You, Pt. I

*Submitted by Shipmate Steve Jackson our American shipmate
By Douglas H. Stutz, Naval Hospital Bremerton Public Affairs*

Silke Nied Sookbirsingh and

Willie Tart shared their stories of overcoming odds and weathering hardships in the best-selling inspirational book *Unwavering Strength*.

One risked everything including death to escape to freedom. One faced multiple ordeals including loss overcoming each with strong faith. As Navy Medicine focuses on the theme of a *New Year and New You*, there are two staff members at Naval Hospital Bremerton (NHB) who have gone above and beyond to share their stories on such a premise. Silke Nied Sookbirsingh, certified medical assistant with 4/OB clinic and Willie Tart, Information Management Department electronic health records trainer, have shared their stories of overcoming odds and weathering hardships in the best-selling inspirational book *Unwavering Strength*. The book was released Oct. 3, 2014, in Toronto Canada. Sookbirsingh, who went by just her maiden name Nied in the book, and Tart are featured with 30 other authors.

Each author focuses on how they dealt with adversity by finding inner strength. From death to daring defections, these stories take readers through the author's experiences and the sorrow, hurt, and tragedy associated with each. Nied found out about the upcoming book from Tart and her harrowing chronicle is told in the chapter, *Escape from Behind the Iron Curtain*.

Silke Nied Sookbirsingh is a certified medical assistant with 4/OB clinic.



There are a few people here at NHB who knew my story, but there are a lot of others who did not and are now interested," said Nied, who made it back to Toronto for the release and associated book signing. If there is one central theme or message from Nied's story, it's "never to take freedom for granted."

Phrases like the "Cold War" and the "Iron Curtain" might be a generation removed, but for Nied who grew up in East Germany, the words form a legacy of liberty denied before freedom was found. The release date of *Unwavering Strength* coincidentally falls on the same date as the official reunification of Germany. The Berlin Wall came down in Nov. 9, 1989. That seminal moment marked the end of communist rule for many. But during the 45 years of the deadly divide between east and west, countless Germans had tried in vain to escape.

Although no concise figure is known, hundreds of people died seeking their freedom and countless more suffered during that time. The barbed wire, machine gun, and land mines took a deadly physical and psychological toll. "The Berlin Wall was built officially to keep the enemy out, but everyone there knew it was to keep the East Germans in," said Nied.

Several groups note that more than 1,100 people died trying to escape the heavily fortified and mined former East-West German border between 1961 and 1989. In addition, according to the Potsdam Centre for Historical Research, an estimated 100,000 people were also imprisoned in East

Germany for trying to flee to the West.

"The Berlin Wall was built officially to keep the enemy out, but everyone there knew it was to keep the East Germans in."



“Nevertheless, many people tried to escape,” Nied said. “Some were successful. Some paid with their lives. Never in my wildest dreams did I think my parents would ever risk our lives. Why would they want to start over at their age? The answer was simple; Freedom!” It was during a summer vacation in Bulgaria and Romania that the actual idea of committing to a family exodus to the West was solidified. At a camp ground one evening, Silke’s Uncle Dietmar from West Germany made a surprise appearance. Plans were discussed of actually trying to make a run for it, or in their case, a swim for it across the River Danube. But it was easier to talk about than make happen. Any short span across the river wouldn’t work even at night due to a full moon, making it impossible to elude border guards. They next tried to find a suitable place in Hungary to swim across, but found they couldn’t even get close

to shore without getting shot.

Discouraged, but not defeated, they drove back home and commenced to plan the next attempt.

“We knew we had to train to swim at least three kilometers (approx. 1.86 miles) across the river,” said Nied. Necessary

precautions would have to be taken against the elements.

They also needed to ensure that all the required personal credentials were protected and would make it across the border. In a scene straight out of a Cold War spy movie, important family papers were passed between Silke’s father Ulrich and her uncle at an autobahn rest stop, with her father placing them in one of the stalls and then the uncle going in to retrieve them. But the hardest part of waiting was to keep the family intentions a secret.

A common practice of the border patrol was to shoot first and maybe ask questions later.

“I couldn’t tell anyone about our plans,” related Nied. “Not to my best friend, not even to my grandparents. One word overheard and my parents would have been arrested and sent to prison for at least 12 years and I would have been placed in an orphanage.” On July 19, 1979, after the several aborted attempts, numerous sleepless nights, and anxious days filled with trepidation, Silke and her family set out for the small Romanian town of Orsovo near the Danube. Their plan was to swim across the bay there to

Yugoslavia and Uncle Dietmar, who would then whisk them to West Germany and freedom.

A common practice of the border patrol was to shoot first and maybe ask questions later. Bodies were commonly left where they fell, as a none-too-gentle reminder to all on the perils of trying to flee. “Needless to say, I was

Although no concise figure is known, hundreds of people died seeking their freedom and countless more suffered during that time. The barbed wire, machine gun, and land mines took a deadly physical and psychological toll. “The Berlin Wall was built officially to keep the enemy out, but everyone there knew it was to keep the East Germans in,” said Nied. Several groups note that more than 1,100 people died trying to escape the heavily fortified and mined former East-West

German border between 1961 and 1989. In addition, according to the Potsdam Centre for Historical Research, an estimated 100,000 people were also imprisoned in East Germany for trying to flee to the West.

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“Nevertheless, many people tried to escape,” Nied said. “Some were successful. Some paid with their lives. Never in my wildest dreams did I think my parents would ever risk our lives. Why would they want to start over at their age? The answer was simple; Freedom!” It was during a summer vacation in Bulgaria and Romania that the actual idea of committing to a family exodus to the West was solidified. At a camp ground one evening, Silke’s Uncle Dietmar from West Germany made a surprise appearance. Plans were discussed of actually trying to make a run for it, or in their case, a swim for it across the River Danube. But it was easier to talk about than make happen. Any short span across the river wouldn’t work even at night due to a full moon, making it impossible to elude border guards. They next tried to find a suitable place in Hungary to swim across, but found they couldn’t even get close to shore without getting shot. Discouraged, but not defeated, they drove back home and commenced to plan the next attempt. “We knew we had to train to swim at least three kilometers (approx. 1.86 miles) across the river,” said Nied. Necessary precautions would have to be taken



against the elements. They also needed to ensure that all the required personal credentials were protected and would make it across the border. In a scene straight out of a Cold War spy movie, important family papers were passed between Silke's father Ulrich and her uncle at an autobahn rest stop, with her father placing them in one of the stalls and then the uncle going in to retrieve them. But the hardest part of waiting was to keep the family intentions a secret.

A common practice of the border patrol was to shoot first and maybe ask questions later.

‘I couldn't tell anyone about our plans,’ related Nied. ‘Not to my best friend, not even to my grandparents. One word overheard and my parents would have been arrested and sent to prison for at least 12 years and I would have been placed in an orphanage.’

On July 19, 1979, after the several aborted attempts, numerous sleepless nights, and anxious days filled with trepidation, Silke and her family set out for the small Romanian town of Orsovo near the Danube. Their plan was to swim across the bay there to Yugoslavia and Uncle Dietmar, who would then whisk them to West Germany and freedom.

A common practice of the border patrol was to shoot first and maybe ask questions later. Bodies were commonly left where they fell, as a none-too-gentle reminder to all on the perils of trying to flee. ‘Needless to say, I was scared to death,’ Nied remembered. ‘I wasn't so sure anymore that I wanted to be free. But after a while I settled down.’ Their plan called for more subterfuge. Uncle Dietmar registered in the only hotel available to western tourists, and obtained a room overlooking the portion of the bay they planned to swim across. He was to stand outside his well-lit room on the balcony, and raise his arms to his side if the coast was clear.

Silke and her family set out for the small Romanian town of Orsovo near the Danube. Their plan was to swim across the bay there to Yugoslavia

With the fall of darkness, their uncle sent the signal and the time came. Despite a daylight temperature in the 90s, the evening chill added to

the cold of the Danube. As they glided into the water, adrenalin provided fuel for their freedom. ‘Everything was so quiet, almost eerie and so unreal,’ said Nied.

The lights behind them on the Romanian side grew smaller as they made their way to the shore of Yugoslavia, looking for one red light and one green light, the standard maritime signal markers for ships plying up and down the river. ‘We could feel our wet clothes getting heavier and heavier,’ Nied recalled. Half way across, a Romanian patrol boat flashed on their search lights. Silke and her parents dove several times to avoid being caught in the glare as it passed over the river. Just as that nautical problem was handled, another rose. Instead of one red light and one green, there was two of each, with one set of lights moving.

‘It was a ship. Something no one had thought of,’ said Nied. ‘It could have been our death if we swam towards it and got caught in the propeller or ran over.’

Just as it seemed Silke had no strength left to make it, she felt her mother Ingrid drag her the final few meters to the other side. They had made it across. Right into handcuffs by patrolling Yugoslavian border guards. For almost two weeks, they were kept under watch by the local police and constantly questioned as their uncle frantically searched the area

for them, fearing the worst had happened. They were then transferred to the Yugoslavian capital of Belgrade where diplomatic intervention had them finally at the West German embassy, but not before ensuring it wasn't an East German ruse. The emotions of the moment took over. ‘Mom and dad started crying and I couldn't understand why,’ she said. ‘But I then realized that we were free. We were on West German soil.’

In the meantime, Uncle Dietmar was still driving up and down the Danube trying to find any clue as to their whereabouts. ‘He spent two weeks trying to find us before he returned home empty handed,’ Nied said.

Eventually he told family that they were lost, presumably forever. Three more Cold War casualties caught by the Iron Curtain.



Never take freedom for granted. It can be taken away in an instant.

But when Silke and her parents reached Frankfurt, her mother phoned ahead to let their family know they were coming. ôMy aunt was somewhat shocked, confused and ecstatic at the same time,ô recalled Nied. ôShe then called my uncle and told him we were okay. He couldn't believe it at first. Then he helped to bring out the champagne to celebrate.ô

ôI related my story to my children so they never take freedom for granted. It can be taken away in an instant. I will forever be grateful to my parents that they had the courage to be free,ô Nied said.

To be continuedë .

Continued from Page 8

These men, together with our own wounded were taken aboard HMS *Gossamer*, who came right alongside to affect the transfer. One of the other minesweepers HMS *Harrier*, risking the very real danger of our stricken cruiser capsizing on top of her, came alongside the other side of the ship to take off the remainder of our ships company.

Shortly afterwards, the *Edinburgh*, little more than a floating hulk and a pitiful sight was dispatched by a torpedo from HMS *Foresight*.

Sitting in one of the messes of HMS *Harrier*, the shock and reaction of the preceding forty hours set in. When the pipe was made for all survivors to muster for a tot of rum, I was hardly able to stand, my legs were that shaky. Hoping no one would notice the miserable state we were in, or that we were only eighteen and therefore not old enough to draw a tot, another ex-boy and myself joined the queue being issued cups of Grog.

As we approached the head of the line, one of the *Crushers* "shouted,

"Not those two, they're UA"¹

However our Jaunty, whose name I cannot recall, but who I will always remember with gratitude, spoke sharply to the RPO, informing ALL survivors were to be given a tot of rum. Turning to us and giving us two cups containing Pusser's rum, he said kindly,

"Come on lads, drink it up it will do you the world of good"

I had had the odd 'sippers' and 'gulpers' from messmates previously, but obviously never a whole tot to myself before. It warmed the cockles of my heart and drove away the fear and the trembling, Dutch courage perhaps, but at least we could laugh and make wry jokes about the situation we were in.

Our journey back to Russia and our sojourn there before returning to Britain well that's another story. That tot and taste of Pusser's rum will remain carved in my memory forever.



One for Submariners

Four Submarine Veterans are walking down the street. When they see a sign that says "Veterans Bar," they go in. The barman asks what they will have and they all ask for a pint of lager.

He delivers the drinks and says, "That will be 25 pence," They can't believe their good luck.

They finish the drinks and order another round and the bartender again says, "That will be 25 pence."

This whets their curiosity, so they ask the bartender, "How can you afford to serve a pint of lager for 25 pence?"

The barman replies, "I guess you've seen the decor here. Well, I am a retired Submariner and I always wanted to own a bar. Last year I hit the lottery for £12 million and decided to open this place for real veterans. Every drink costs 25 pence -- wine, spirits, beer all the same."

They notice four guys at the end of the bar who haven't ordered anything.

They ask, "What's with them?"

The bartender says "Oh, those are retired Skimmers, they are waiting for Happy Hour."