



AHOY SHIPMATE

RNA Torbay Newsletter

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DID YOU KNOW?

One inch of rain holds the same amount of water as fifteen inches of powdery snow.

The term luggage (the belongings of a traveller or the container thereof) is derived from the literal action of using it: you lug your belongings around in your luggage.

Rubies and sapphires are both variants of the mineral aluminium oxide (crystalline form); commonly known as corundum—imperfect and opaque corundum samples are typically used for industrial purposes instead of jewellery.

The last year Olympians received a truly gold medal was 1912 (since then all gold medallists have received a silver medal plated in gold).

While commanding the lunar orbiter Endeavour, astronaut Alfred Worden had the distinction of being the most isolated human being ever—he was 2,235 miles away from the astronauts on the surface of the moon and 200,000 miles away from Earth.

Editorial

By Shipmate Norrie Millen

Hi! Shipmates,

MY apologies for no June issue, but in mitigation I had rather a lot on my plate so to speak.

I had long planned; a holiday in Canada both for some respite and a well needed rest. Extremely hot there at this time of year and I had to switch to tropical routine and clothing! Long time since I wore shorts 24/7 and for over two weeks.

Had a great time, visiting and playing golf with my brother, looking up old friends and shipmates. Also went to my old Navy Club for men only night dinner, sad to see only 22 in attendance, changed days from when I cooked for over 100 shipmates.

I also got the chance to attend the Barrie Vets (of which I am a Life member) bi-monthly dinner. 190 in attendance and a very interesting after dinner speaker; who had spent years tracking down her grandfather's remains who was posted MIA during WWII.

The chap (ex RCN) I was supposed to meet, did not show, however I did meet up with a work acquaintance I had not seen or heard from in over 16 years. We were both CWO's in Canadian Corps of Commissaries and attached to Workman's Compensation Board.

Flights over and back a real nightmare, but real bad news was that my wife had been rushed into Torbay hospital just a couple of days (unbeknown to me) after I left, with dangerously high level of calcium, acute dehydration and suffering severe pains in her lower body. After CT & MRI scans, she was diagnosed with cancer. I guess the nicest place for Angela right now is in someone's thoughts; the safest place to be is in everyone's prayers

The way I see it anyway!



Chairman's Corner*By Shipmate John Soanes***The Lt/Cdr Arthur
Leyland Harrison
VC Memorial****Renovation Project is
now well underway.**

Our aim is to do "A proper job" and renew the inscribed tablet with a quality deeply inscribed stone, which should last for many years. We also plan to renovate the stone surround to ensure that the memorial will remain in first class condition for many years.

Our aim is to raise in excess of £2,000, which hopefully will cover any contingencies. Confidently the project will be completed sometime in 2017 to ensure it is looking it's best by the centenary on 23rd April 2018. I have written to Torbay Council advising them of our plans. (We don't want any last minute hiccups from the Council or Tor2 who I understand are responsible for the maintenance of Roundham Head.)

Collections are currently being planned to take place at a number of large retail stores in Torquay and Paignton, our thanks to S/M's Terry Mambery and Fred Minchin for making some initial contact. Letters have also been written seeking support from likely donor organisations. One of our first sizable donations was from our Torbay member, Shipmate Steven Jackson who, as we are all aware continues to serve with the United States Navy.

Our next Quiz Evening is scheduled to take place following the branch meeting on Thursday 25th August. The evening will include a raffle and our usual 1 to 100 raffle for a bottle of Pusser's Rum. Please make every effort to 'be there' and to donate a raffle prize which will go a long way in making the evening a success.

**CALM DOWN
TAKE A DEEP BREATH
& HOLD IT FOR ABOUT 20 MINUTES****100 mph goat**

Two Tennessee rednecks are out hunting, and as they are walking along, they came upon a huge hole in the ground.

They approach it and are amazed at the size of it.

The first hunter says, "Wow, that's some hole; I can't even see the bottom. I wonder how deep it is?"

The second hunter says, "I don't know. Let's throw somethin' down there, listen and see how long it takes to hit bottom."

The first hunter says, "Hey, there's an old truck gearbox over there. Give me a hand, we'll throw it in and see."

Therefore, they pick it up, carry it over, count one, two, three then, and heave it in the hole. They are standing there listening, looking over the edge, when they hear a rustling behind them. As they turn around, they see a goat come crashing through the underbrush, run up to the hole and, without hesitation, jump in headfirst.

While they are standing there staring at each other in amazement, peering into the hole, trying to figure out what that was all about, an old farmer saunters up.

"Say there," says the farmer, "You fellers didn't happen to see my goat around here anywhere, did you?"

The first hunter says, "Funny you should ask, but we were just standing here a minute ago and a goat came running out of the bushes doin' bout a hunnert miles an hour and jumped .headfirst into this here hole!!"

The old farmer said, "Naw, that's impossible

I had him chained to an old gearbox."

A few tubas short of a band

BRUSSELS—The military band of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization is a few tubas short of a full brass section.

It's also missing some French horns, and a clarinet. In fact, there are only 12 military musicians, all from the U.S., who spend a lot of time trying to sound like 20.

A lot of the anthems we perform, how should I say it, are pretty bare-bones," said U.S. Army First Sgt. Tom MacTaggart, the outgoing band leader. "They are simplified. They are not the full versions. If you go to a country and there is a 40-piece band you get all the bells and whistles."

To compensate, the NATO band will occasionally try to borrow musicians from other countries, or re-orchestrate the score, or use guitar effects to mimic other instruments. That only goes so far. Army Sgt. Thomas Katsiyannis

"With 12 members, you are not going to march down the street in a parade," said Sgt. MacTaggart. "So we don't do too much of that."

The U.S. takes its military, and its military bands, far more seriously than any other ally. In 2015, the Pentagon spent \$437 million on

bands, an amount that exceeds the entire individual defence budgets of NATO allies Albania, Iceland, Latvia, Luxembourg and Slovenia.

Among the alliance's 28 nations, only the U.S. today sends musicians. France and

Canada once did, but quit in 2014.

The band problem is just like the continuing challenge facing the trans-Atlantic alliance, which holds its every-two-year summit this week, only smaller. European powers don't spend enough on their militaries or have enough deployable troops to fill NATO missions, according to U.S. and alliance officials.

The military musicians assigned to the alliance are officially known as the Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe, or SHAPE, International Band. When fewer than all dozen musicians are available, the band members skip the complicated SHAPE Fanfare, and instead play the NATO Hymn, which is easier to perform with only a few instruments.

U.S. Air Force Tech. Sgt. Amber Grimes, the band's vocalist, sang a cappella version of the Belgian national anthem at a reception in Brussels. That didn't require any instruments at all. Afterward, Jean De Cannière, an official with the United Fund for Belgium, a charity, praised the performance.

"It was really moving," said Mr. De Cannière, "She started in Dutch and then switched to French. For an American, that is quite a feat."



"How long did it take you to learn that, mister?"



REMEMBERING JUTLAND

100 Years on

Extracted from a supplement in Portsmouth Evening News written by Dr. Sam Willis Historian. Archaeologist. broadcaster and author of Fighting Shins



Last month marked 100 years since The Battle of Jutland, an all out clash for control of the seas and the greatest naval contest of the First World War.

This extraordinary conflict between the world's two largest navies in 1916 is less known than other battles but no less influential on the wars outcome.

It also had a devastating effect back home for the families for the thousands that perished.

The writer's great grandfather served on HMS Calliope and was one of a handful to win the Conspicuous Gallantry Medal.

For historians like myself, it is a fascinating part of our nation's history, which still raises questions to this day.

Jutland was the climax of more than a decade of antagonism between the British and German navies.

The battle did not conclude in a decisive victory for either side, prompting an argument about who won which continues to this day.

Britain lost the most ships and men but kept control of the sea.

The Germans returned to their bases and did not try again to challenge the Royal

Navy for control of the North Sea.

In this special supplement, we remember the Battle of Jutland and those brave sailors on both sides who fought.

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Key protagonists

By Kate Clements, Imperial War Museum,

The Battle of Jutland involved 100,000 men both from the British and the German navies.

Four of these men in particular were crucial to the events that took place.

Their decisions and actions during the Battle of Jutland ultimately contributed to its outcome.

Admiral Reinhard Scheer

Reinhard Scheer joined the Imperial German Navy in 1879. He was a dynamic, confident leader; who brought optimism to his role in command of the German High Seas Fleet, which he gained control in early 1916.

His career survived Jutland and he became Chief of the Naval Staff in August 1918 but retired the Imperial German Navy December of that year.

Scheer died in 1928 and is buried at, Weimar.



Vice Admiral Sir David Beatty

David Beatty was a charismatic and dashing leader. He joined the Royal Navy in 1884 and his confidence and abilities, ensured he quickly rose up the ranks. He was appointed rear admiral at the comparatively young age of 38 and was a favourite of Winston Churchill, the first Lord of the Admiralty who made him his Naval Secretary in 1911. Beatty became commander of the Battlecruiser Fleet (BCF) in 1914, leading it through the early engagements of the war at Heligoland Bight and the Dogger Bank.

His independent nature led to a difficult working relationship with his commander, Jellicoe, which caused problems at Jutland

After Jutland, Jellicoe was given a non-operational role and Beatty stepped in to replace him in command of the Grand Fleet. In 1919, he became First Sea Lord a position he held until 1927. After he retired, his health steadily declined and he died in London in 1936.

Admiral Sir John Jellicoe

A quietly confident, unassuming man, Jellicoe joined the Royal Navy in 1872. His polite, studious nature and attention to detail ensured he steadily advanced through the naval promotion system and he was second in command of the Home Fleet as war approached. He was 54 years old when he was made commander of the Grand Fleet as war broke out in August 1914. He was reluctant to take up the post, however, and only did so after some intervention from the First Lord of the Admiralty, Winston Churchill. Jellicoe's cautious and considered style of leadership was the opposite of Beatty's dashing boldness.

In November 1916, Jellicoe was appointed First Sea Lord and never again took part in operations at sea. He died in 1935 and was buried at St. Paul's Cathedral.

Vice Admiral Franz Hipper

Franz Hipper joined the Imperial German Navy in 1881.

After holding several commands and serving around the world, he was put in charge of all German scouting forces in 1913.

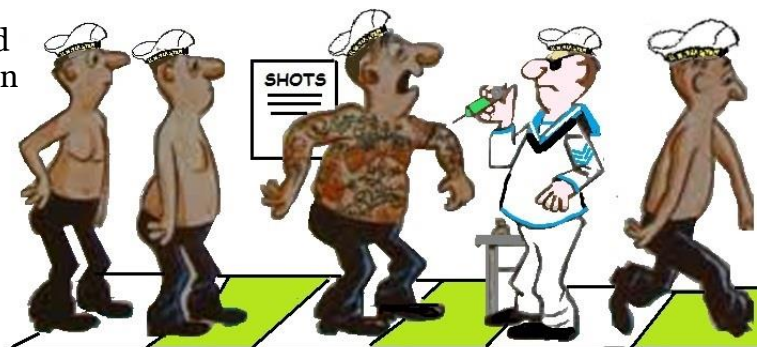
Vice Admiral Hipper was an excellent tactician, who commanded effectively during the Battle of the Dogger Bank in 1914. As commander of the 'I' Scouting Group of battlecruisers, Hipper played a key role in putting Admiral Scheer's plan into effect at Jutland.

Hipper took over from Scheer in control of the High Seas Fleet.

He retired from the Imperial German Navy a few months later. He died in 1932.

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Belligerents			
	United Kingdom		Germany
Commanders and leaders			
	Sir John Jellicoe		Reinhard Scheer
	Sir David Beatty		Franz Hipper
Strength			
Total: 151 combat ships		Total: 99 combat ships	
28	battleships	16	battleships
9	battlecruisers	5	battlecruisers
8	armoured	6	pre-dreadnoughts
	cruisers	11	light cruisers
26	light cruisers	61	torpedo-boats ^[a]
78	destroyers		
1	minelayer		
1	seaplane carrier		
Casualties and losses			
6,094	killed	2,551	killed
674	wounded	507	wounded
177	captured	1	battlecruiser
3	battlecruisers	1	pre-dreadnought
3	armoured cruisers	4	light cruisers
8	destroyers	5	torpedo-boats
(113,300 tons sunk)		(62,300 tons sunk)	



"Are you sure it won't show?"

The most famous 16-year old in Britain

By Able Seaman Alexander Saridis Royal Navy

DO YOU recognise this boy? He was the most famous 16-year old 100 years ago.

His name was Jack Cornwall, a boy gunner in the Royal Navy of 1916 and the youngest ever recipient of the Victoria Cross.



He is also my great great uncle.

Jack was an ordinary boy from London and he joined the navy in the First World War when he was just 15.

Six weeks after joining he found himself in the middle of the biggest clash of warships, the world had ever seen at the Battle of Jutland.

His ship, HMS Chester, was hit 18 times by German shells, four of which landed near Jack's gun.

The attacks killed all but two of the gun's crew and left Jack severely wounded.

However, he stayed at his gun awaiting orders, until HMS Chester withdrew from the battle. When taken for treatment there was little the ship's surgeons or hospital doctors could do, and he died on June 2, 1916, before his mother could reach his bedside.

A report from the Commanding Officer of HMS Chester said "Boy (1st Class) John Travers Cornwall of the Chester was mortally wounded early in the action. He nevertheless remained standing alone at a most exposed post, quietly awaiting orders until the end of the action, with the gun's crew and wounded all round him"

Jack's military funeral was the largest public event of the entire war and he was posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross.

As this year marks 100 years since the Battle of Jutland, all I would ask is, don't forget Jack and those who fell alongside him.

A Plumber dies in a car accident on his 50th birthday and finds himself at the Pearly Gates. A brass band is playing, the angels are singing a beautiful hymn, there is a huge crowd cheering and shouting his name, and absolutely everyone wants to shake his hand.

Just when he thinks things can't possibly get any better, Saint Peter himself runs over, apologizes for not greeting him personally at the Pearly Gates, shakes his hand, and says, "*Congratulations son, we've been waiting a long time for you.*"

Totally confused and a little embarrassed, the Plumber sheepishly looks at Saint Peter and says, "*Saint Peter, I tried to lead a God-fearing life, I loved my family, I tried to obey the 10 Commandments, but congratulations for what? I honestly don't remember doing anything really special when I was alive. Is it because I'm a Plumber?*"

"*Congratulations for what?*" says Saint Peter, totally amazed at the man's modesty. "*We're celebrating the fact that you lived to be 160 years old! God himself wants to see you!*"

The Plumber is awestruck and can only look at Saint Peter with his mouth wide open. When he regains his power of speech, he looks up at Saint Peter and says "*Saint Peter, I lived my life in the eternal hope that when I died I would be judged by God and be found to be worthy, but I only lived to be fifty.*"

"*That's simply impossible son,*" says Saint Peter, "*We've added up all your time sheets.*"

"Join the Navy and see the World"

By Shipmate John Soanes

This was one of my motives for joining up. As a 16 year old, I signed on for twelve years continuous service, which commenced on 12th May 1953, when I arrived at Victoria Barracks Southsea, Portsmouth to start my initial eight weeks training, the highlight of which was a trip on an Algerine Class minesweeper around the ships assembled for the 1953 Coronation Review.

On completion of my initial training on 15th July 1953, I joined the Illustrious Class Aircraft carrier *HMS IMPLACABLE* of the 2nd Training Squadron usually based at Portland Dorset. To join her I had to travel to Rosyth, Scotland. This is when my travels really started, up until then; the furthest I had travelled from home was 108 miles on a school visit to the Festival of Britain in 1951.

The ship left Scotland to return to Portland, where we remained until 17th September, when we sailed in company with *HMS INDEFATIGABLE* for fleet exercises. These to take place around the Scilly Isles and the Bristol Channel before returning to Spithead on 1st October.

Later that day the *IMPLACABLE* sailed for the Clyde for what was to be a stay of several days as part of the autumn cruise. However, on the 3rd October, only hours after we had anchored off Greenock, the ship was ordered to sail for Plymouth to prepare for what was described as a 'special operation'

On arriving at Devonport, Plymouth on 5th October 1953, it was rumoured that we were bound for the Caribbean. This was soon confirmed when we started the embarkation of military equipment. It seems that the Crown Colony of British Guiana, on the mainland of South America, which was acquired by Britain during the Napoleonic Wars, was now under the threat of a Communist takeover by the Peoples Progressive Party, led by a Dr Cheddi

Jagan. Much needed action by the British Government was urgently required.

During the next few days, more equipment and stores were taken on board and on the 10th October, we embarked 650 troops of the Argyle and Sutherland Highlanders and by 5.30 pm, we had sailed. As the ship passed Western King Point, a lone piper from the Royal Marines barracks played to the departing troops who were manning the flight deck.

Initially, it had been intended for *HMS IMPLACABLE* to sail direct to Georgetown British Guiana; however, *HMS SUPERB*, which had landed the Welch Fusiliers there, had experienced great difficulties transferring vehicles and stores to lighters in the heavy swell some fifteen miles off shore. Therefore, it was decided that *IMPLACABLE* would head for Port of Spain, Trinidad, where a transfer could be made more easily.

After a relatively calm crossing of the Atlantic, we arrived in Trinidad in glorious hot sunny weather and immediately started the disembarkation of the troops and equipment to the *SS SUNJARV* an unemployed Canadian Bauxite vessel.

On completion of the unloading, which took, about two days, we were informed that the C-in-C West Indies had arranged for *IMPLACABLE*, as a thank you, to visit Barbados for a two-day stay, allowing everyone at least one 'run ashore'.

We sailed for Barbados on Trafalgar Day arriving in Barbados on the 22nd October, where everyone thoroughly enjoyed themselves, especially this young 16 year old who was introduced to Rum and Coke!

During the visit, the Royal Marines beat the retreat and in return, the people of Bridgetown put on an impromptu firework display.



On Saturday 24th October, the *IMPLACABLE* returned to Port of Spain, anchoring to embark the men and equipment of the Royal Welch Fusiliers for a trip to Kingston Jamaica where we anchored off the Myrtle Bank Hotel, Kingston. Once again, disembarkation began. On the 31st October we sailed for the UK and arrived back in Plymouth on the morning of 11th November. Within a few days, the ship entered dry dock for hull maintenance, following which the ship returned to Portland.

On the 1st December, having completed my sea training, I was drafted to Chatham to await my first commission.

Since leaving Portland in September the ship had steamed over 12,000 miles and visited some great places. I never dreamed that I would visit so many exotic destinations in my first few months in the RN. The saying '*Join the Navy and see the World*' certainly lived up to my expectations and I was still a couple of months short of my seventeenth birthday!

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Proud flagship to memorial for the dead

THESE colourful three-dimensional images belie the horrors played out here in an instant on Wednesday afternoon 100 years ago.

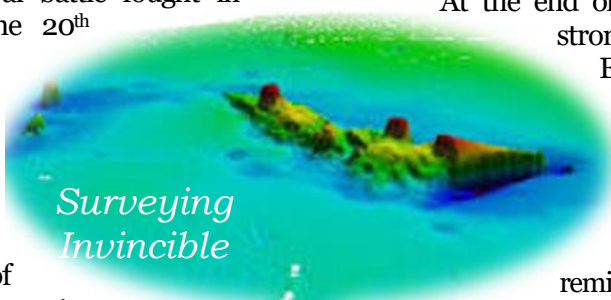
This is the wreck of HMS *Invincible*, blown up during the greatest naval battle fought in European waters in the 20th century.

For the first time, the Royal Navy surveyed the twisted and battered remains of the ships lost on 31 May 1916, at the Battle of Jutland using 21st century technology.

Ahead of the battle's centenary this year, *HMS Echo* spent a week scouring the floor of the North Sea with her State-of-the-art suite.

The result is a fresh understanding of the condition and layout of the Jutland wrecks after 99 years below

For the ship's company of HMS *Echo* it was also an insight into the sacrifices made by British and German sailors.

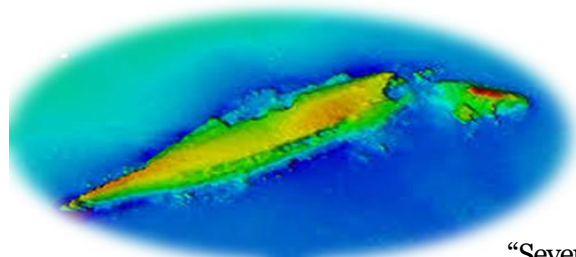


Two hundred and fifty warships from the two navies clashed from the afternoon of 31 May until the small hours of the following morning.

When it was over, 25 ships – 14 of them British – were at the bottom of the North Sea and more than 8,500 men were dead.

More than 1,000 of those Royal Navy dead were killed when battle cruiser *Invincible* was torn apart when a German shell plunged through the roof of her Q turret. The resulting fire detonated her magazines.

Invincible's death – described by one witness as “an astonishing sight, probably unique in naval warfare” provided the iconic sight of the battle.



“Several big explosions followed, great tongues of flame shot out from her riveted side, the masts collapsed, the ship broke in two, and an enormous pall of black smoke rose to the sky,” recalled Lieutenant William Chalmers, who watched *Invincible* blow up from the bridge of HMS *Lion*.

“One moment she was a proud flagship, full of life, intent on her prey; the next she was just two sections of twisted metal, her bow and the stern standing up out of the water like two large tombstones suddenly raised in honour of 1,0236 British dead.”

At the end of the wreck surveying, the 40 strong ship's company of HMS *Echo* held a service of remembrance before casting wreath into the North Sea in memory of the British and German dead.

“The week has been a poignant reminder of the sacrifices the Royal navy made in protecting our nation during World War One,” said *Echo*'s Commanding Officer Cdr. Phillip Newell.

The loss of nearly 10,000 sailors over two days seems unbelievable today, and I'm very humbled to have surveyed the wrecks of both British and German warships where so many men lost their lives.”

On all the oceans white caps flow,
They have no crosses row on row,
For those who sleep beneath the sea,
They sleep in peace; our country's free

U.S. and French Navies Differ on alcohol aboard ships

French and U.S. officials boast of the closeness of their military alliance, as highlighted by Saturday's visit from U.S. Defence Secretary Ash Carter to a French aircraft carrier in the Gulf.

However even at sea, some cultural differences are apparent: French sailors can imbibe alcohol within moderation while on ship, while American sailors follow a policy of almost total abstinence. There are no fewer than four bars on the Charles de Gaulle, where troops can purchase one alcoholic drink per day.

On Saturday morning, French sailors prepared and served coffee behind a large curved bar outfitted with wooden stools. A wall sign advertised available drinks, including Heineken or draft beers for 1.25 euros (\$1.36), or Baileys, Johnnie Walker or wine for 1.50 euros (\$1.63). "We are French," said a spokesperson for the French Navy, Commander Lionel Delort. "Wine is very appreciated on board."

Not so, within the U.S. Navy, which has a strict no-drinking policy aboard its ships, with few exceptions. For instance, if a vessel has been at sea for 45 consecutive days or more, sailors are allowed to have two beers, on a one-time basis.

Carter's visit on Saturday to the Charles de Gaulle aircraft carrier was designed to highlight the joint resolve of U.S. and French forces to defeat Islamic State, which claimed responsibility for attacks that killed 130 people in Paris last month. Both countries are conducting air strikes against the militants in Syria and Iraq.

There are about 10 U.S. service personnel at any one time on the Charles de Gaulle, where they are governed by French rules of conduct - meaning they can drink, too. "It's a cultural thing. We view alcohol very differently than the French do," said Anthony, a U.S. Navy lieutenant, explaining the U.S. policy. He declined to give his last name.

The Royal Canadian Navy last year banned alcohol at sea except for special occasions,

after allegations of drunken misconduct by some crew while at port in San Diego.

To prevent the risk of tipsy sailors around deadly weaponry, the French use an electronic scanning system to track who has already reached the limit of a drink per day. The Charles de Gaulle began its long-planned current deployment on Nov. 18, days after the Paris assaults.

During 10 days in the eastern Mediterranean, it launched 10 to 15 flight missions per day targeting

Islamic State, and is due to resume operations soon, after arriving in the Gulf on Friday. During a recent lunch, sailors asked for a second bottle of wine but were refused by their quartermaster, Delort recounted. "This is not a spring break," he said. "You have to be fit."

Charles De Gaulle (R91).



Welfare Report

By Shipmate Norrie Millen



Our President Shipmate Peter Brown is slowly getting better and better. During a recent phone call, he says he can now drive a little further than just local and can drive to Newton Abbot and places like Teignmouth. Sadly, Pat is not feeling too grand and has some pain that requires investigation by her doctors initially. We wish them both well, especially Pat.

Shipmate Peter Roberts who was slowly improving after his bout in hospital, reports he has some complications set in and is under treatment by his doctor, get well soon Peter

It's that time of life, we always seem to have couple of shipmates in the 'Walking Wounded' category and we wish them all a speedy recovery.

To repeat note in last issue; I am part Volunteer Veteran's Support Group in Kingsteignton. There are other groups in Torbay and South & East Devon. Ivybridge, Budleigh Salterton. If you know of anyone that would like some support, either at home or with a group, do let me know.

The group supports veterans and serving personnel who suffer from PTSD and associated mental health issues. It is a casual drop in for Coffee/Tea (& small eats) Kingsteignton from 1130 - 1330 every Wednesday. Note the change in time.

Able Seacat Simon – Received Dickin Medal For Heroism On British Ship

Able Seacat Simon was an orphan who grew up on the dockyards of Hong Kong before finding work aboard a British ship.

There, he protected the crew and raised morale until his ship was attacked.

The injured were evacuated, but Simon stayed onboard even though he was badly hurt.

Upon recovering, he returned to his duties for which he received awards and the gratitude of Britain.

It is believed that Simon was born on Stonecutter's Island (now part of Kowloon), sometime in 1947. That's where Ordinary Seaman George Hickinbottom noticed him in March of the following year.

Hickinbottom was a 17-year-old who had joined the Navy the previous year and felt sorry for the homeless orphan. Unfortunately, the sailor's rank didn't entitle him to private quarters, but to bunk right beside the captain's cabin.

Stationed aboard the British frigate HMS Amethyst, it was Hickinbottom's job to make sure the ship was kept clean and that everything was in order. The sailor smuggled Simon aboard by hiding the poor waif in his shirt – for Simon was

a cat.

Fortunately, Lieutenant Commander Ian Griffiths liked cats. He also understood the value of keeping the ship's rat population under control, but the Ordinary Seaman was not off the hook. Griffiths threatened to have the sailor up on charges if he saw any cat poo onboard.

Thankfully, Simon was very likeable. The ship's crew saw to it that whenever the



new recruit made a mess, it didn't stay visible for long, greatly easing Hickinbottom's job and stress levels.

Besides catching rats on a daily basis, Simon developed a deep bond with Griffiths. All the captain had to do was whistle, and Simon would come running. Then the two would make their rounds of the ship, making sure everything was in order.

The cat even gave his captain daily gifts – dumping dead and bloody rats at the man's feet and even on his bed. And whenever the captain wasn't wearing his cap, Simon would sleep in it.

But he never forgot his debt to George and the other men, spending time with the lower rank whenever possible. He even entertained them by fishing ice cubes from jugs of water with his paws on command.

In December, however, Griffiths was given a new posting and felt it best to leave Simon behind. As luck would

have it the new captain,

Lieutenant

Commander Bernard Skinner also liked cats, even though Simon never

responded to his whistles nor followed his new master around

the ship.

Everything was idyllic until April 1949 when the Amethyst was ordered to Nanking to relieve the HMS Consort. The Chinese Civil War between the Kuomintang and the Communists had broken out, so the Consort had to protect the British Embassy and be ready to evacuate personnel if needed.



Simon and his fellow crew members admiring a giant pie

At 8:31 AM on April 20, they were on the Yangtze River when they came under fire. Not sure who was doing the firing; they hoisted the White Ensign and the Union Jack. Fortunately, the shooting stopped, and they sailed on.



Unfortunately, their luck didn't last. An hour later, as the Amethyst neared Jiangyin further upriver, it was fired upon by the People's Liberation Army (PLA - the communists). The first missile flew over the ship, but the next hit the bridge, the wheelhouse, and the low power room. The captain and the coxswain steering the wheel were badly hurt, so the ship turned and grounded on a sandbank.

The British tried to fire back, but nothing happened because the low power room was damaged, rendering the gun-firing circuits useless. Though also hurt, First Lieutenant Geoffrey L. Weston assumed command and got a message out before another shell took out the generator.



Sometime after 10 AM, Weston ordered his men to board the lifeboats and make it to shore, but the PLA had no mercy for them, either. Only 64 made it to the south bank. The shooting stopped at 11 PM, leaving 22 dead (including Skinner) and 31 wounded.

Having become lighter, the Amethyst refloated at midnight of April 21. Several rescue attempts failed and negotiations bogged down because the PLA wanted the British to admit that the Amethyst had fired first. Throughout the negotiations, the PLA forbade the Amethyst from being resupplied, though it relented occasionally,

preventing the remaining crew from starving to death.

Simon had been badly hurt during the first shelling but managed to crawl his way up to the deck. It took a while to notice him because priority went to the men. By the time they did, they noticed his whiskers and eyebrows had been burned off,

there was dried blood on his back and legs from four shrapnel wounds, but he had no broken bones.

With so many men off the ship, the medical officer was able to treat him but didn't expect him to survive. He recovered, however, and was allowed to cuddle up to the other injured sailors. In doing so, he helped boost morale during the long siege.

Having recovered from the worst of his wounds, he went back on active duty and not a moment too soon. In his absence, the rat population was again out of control, threatening their dwindling supplies.

The Amethyst finally escaped on July 30, but Lieutenant Commander John Kerans, the new captain, was no cat lover. Simon tried to win him over by sleeping in the captain's hat, but Kerans threw him out of his cabin.

So Simon gave him a dead rat, but that didn't go over too well, either.

Lt Cdr Kerans makes peace with Simon

Then Captain Kerans came down with a virus, and Simon decided to bunk with the new commander till the man felt better. Entente had at last been reached.

The People's Dispensary for Sick Animals (PDSA) Dickin Medal, given to animals that showed conspicuous gallantry or devotion to duty while serving in military conflict. Kerans also made Simon a 'cat officer' and gave him the rank of 'Able Seacat' after he had successfully killed a



giant rat called Mao Tsetung, which kept escaping traps.

At every port Amethyst stopped at on its route home, Simon was presented with honour, and a special welcome was made for him at Plymouth in November when the ship returned. Simon was, however, like all animals entering the UK, subject to quarantine regulations, and was immediately sent to an animal centre in Surrey.

Whilst in quarantine, Simon contracted a virus and, despite the attentions of medical staff and thousands of well-wishers, died on 28 November 1949 from a complication of the viral infection caused by his war wounds. Hundreds, including the entire crew of HMS Amethyst attended his funeral at the PDSA Ilford Animal Cemetery in East London. His gravestone reads

IN MEMORY OF "SIMON" SERVED IN H.M.S. AMETHYST MAY 1948 - NOVEMBER 1949 AWARDED DICKIN MEDAL AUGUST 1949 DIED 28TH NOVEMBER 1949. THROUGHOUT THE YANGTZE INCIDENT HIS BEHAVIOUR WAS OF THE HIGHEST ORDER



Simon's grave is at the PDSA Animal Cemetery in Ilford. Simon is also commemorated with a bush planted in his honour in the Yangtze Incident Grove at the National Memorial Arboretum in Staffordshire. For his service, he was given the Dickin Medal (the animal version of the Victoria Cross), the Blue Cross, and the Amethyst campaign.

