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Ahoy Shipmate

RNA Torbay Newsletter

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Editorial

By Shipmate Norrie Millen

Hi! Shipmates,

With the Covid situation easing and things starting to return to some sort of normality, we can possibly enjoy life again. Yet will we ever really get back to the normality we once enjoyed prior to the dreadful and devastation pandemic? I am not sure that we ever will. There will always be that fear of the dreaded 'lurgy' returning.

I think a lot of people will attempt to maintain social distancing and I feel sure, like majority of people in Asian countries continue to wear masks. However there will be a lot that will not and probably the same people who have ignored the government advice all along. I cannot help but think that it should never have been advice, but made into legally binding law. Our borders should have been permanently closed, like New Zealand and nearer to home, the Isle of Man. They are now clear because they took the right precautions in a timely manner.

Several weeks ago our PM announced "as of 0400 on Monday.. (forget the actual date) all UK borders, rail, road and air would be closed. What a joke, as approximately 21,000 people a day were still getting into the country. Then PM announced people arriving would have to isolate in hotels at their own expense. I cannot help but ask "If our borders are all closed, how are they getting in?"

A shipmate sent me a dit with a link today with the account of HMS Apollo (Minelaying Cruiser) alleged 'mutiny' in 1957. However it could never be an official mutiny. The word Mutiny was banned. The sentence that was carried out was "*Did Join An Improper Combination(union)*" It seems that several drunken sailors had returned onboard and barricaded themselves in their mess deck. The situation escalated throughout the entire ship, with entire crew being charged and the Captain and officers relieved of their positions. Why do I find this interesting? In 1955 HMS Apollo paid a visit to Teignmouth, my home town. I with other class mates toured the ship and I thought this is the life for me!

That's life!

The way I see it anyway!

Covid Courting!

I went for a walk with my new girlfriend and we saw dogs mating.

She said: "How does the male know when the female is ready for sex?"

I replied: "He can smell she is ready. That's how nature works."

We then walked past a sheep field and the ram was mating the ewe.

Again my girlfriend asked: "How the ram does know when the ewe is ready for sex?"

I replied: "It's nature. He can smell she is ready."

We then went past a cow-field and the bull was mating with the cow.

My girlfriend said: "This is odd. They are really going at it. Surely the bull can't smell when she is ready?"

I said: "Oh, yes; it's nature. All animals can smell when the female is ready for sex."

Anyway, after the walk, I dropped her home and kissed her goodbye.

She said: "Take care and get yourself checked out for Covid-19."

Surprised, "Why do you say that?" I asked her.

She replied: "You seem to have lost your sense of smell."

President's Patter

By Shipmate Terry Membery



Hi Shipmates,

I sincerely hope that you and your families are well and managing.

Not long now before we can have our meetings

Answer from the question in the previous newsletter. Where would you be if you walked down straight street?

The chances are you would be anchored in a harbour.

You would get on a Dghajsa to go ashore, up the Barrakka lift and walk through into Barrakka Gardens and on into straight street(The Gut).

Stone Frigate.

Until the late 19th Century the Royal Navy housed training and other

support facilities in hulks, old wooden ships of the line moored in ports as receiving ships or floating barracks. The Admiralty regarded shore accommodation as expensive and liable to lead to indiscipline. These floating establishments kept their names while the

actual vessels housing them changed. For example, the gunnery training school at Portsmouth occupied three ships between its formation in 1830 and it moves ashore in 1891 but were all named or renamed HMS *Excellent*.

As ships began to use increasingly complex technology during the late 19th century, these facilities became too large to continue and we've moved ashore establishments while keeping their names. An early stone frigate was the engineering college HMS *Marlborough* which had been used for the accommodation of engineering students since

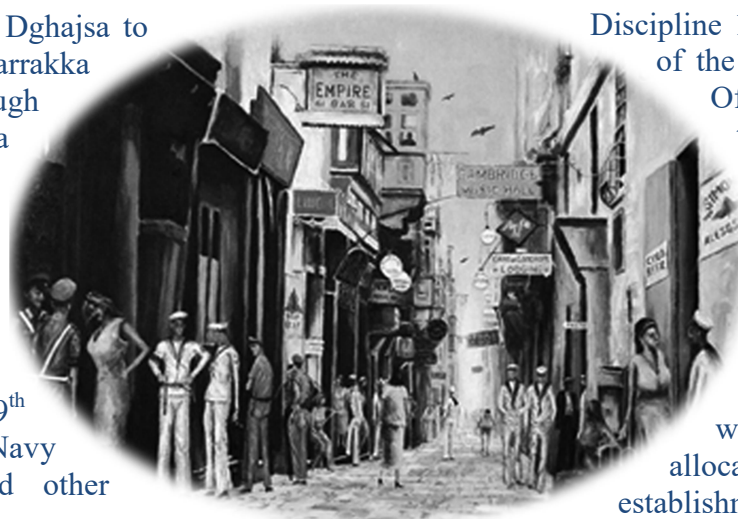
1877. Under section 87 of the Naval Discipline 1866, the provisions

of the act only applied to Officers and Men of the Royal Navy borne on the books of a warship. When

shore establishments began to become more common it was necessary to allocate the title of the establishments to an actual

Remember Once Navy Always Navy

vessel which became the nominal depot ship for the men allocated to the establishment and thus ensured they were subject to the act. The use of stone frigates continues in the Royal Navy and some other Navies



BUTTERCUPS AND GOLF BALLS

Towards the end of a round of golf, Dave hit his ball into the woods and found it in a patch of pretty, yellow buttercups.

Trying to get his ball back into play, he ended up thrashing just about every buttercup in the patch.

All of a sudden, **POOF!!** In a flash and a puff of smoke, a little old woman appeared.

She said, 'I'm Mother Nature! Do you know how long it took me to make those buttercups? Just for doing what you have done, you won't have any butter for your popcorn for the rest of your life..... better still, you won't have any butter for your toast for the rest of your lifeas a matter of fact, you'll never have any butter for anything for the rest of your life!

Then **POOF!** ... she was gone!

After Dave recovered from the shock, he hollered for his friend, "Fred, where are you?"

Fred yells back 'I'm over here in the pussy willows.'

Dave shouts back, "**DON'T SWING**, Fred!"

FOR THE LOVE OF GOD. DON'T SWING!!



More Tea Vicar?

Submitted by Shipmate Chris Thomas



A couple of years ago (when the world was normal!) my wife and I booked a short break at a Farmhouse B&B up on Bodmin Moor.

We gleaned from info on the website and Facebook that the owners had moved from Newton Abbot, so we knew that we might have a few things in common to talk about. It turned out that there was more to chat about than we could have imagined!

After settling into our room we were offered a cream tea in the garden. An ideal time to get to know our host, Ian; who was holding the fort whilst his wife Deborah, was at work.

We went through the usual pleasantries and then began chatting more about our backgrounds. Mention was made that Mrs. T and I met while I was in the Royal Navy. *"Oh I was in the Navy too"* said Ian.

Delving a little deeper, we discovered my six years as a Greenie paled into oblivion with his combined 30 years (over two stints). The tale gets even more interesting because Ian's first spell in the RN was as an officer between 1981/91 retiring as a Lieutenant. He left to follow his calling into the Church of England and was ordained in 1994.

Obviously, the call of the sea was overwhelming, because in 1997 he rejoined "The Mob" as a Chaplain.

Amongst his service he undertook tours in Northern Ireland and Afghanistan with the Royal Marines. In 2014 he was appointed **Chaplain of the Fleet**. Ian left the Navy in 2018.

He was awarded the Queen's Commendation for Valuable Service in

2003 in recognition of "his gallant and distinguished service in Northern Ireland".

In the 2017 New Year Honours, Ian was appointed Companion of the Order of the Bath (CB)

Some of you have probably encountered Ian (Wheatley), either while you were serving or in his role as Chaplain to the RNA.

Running a Guest House in deepest Cornwall seems a far cry from his Naval exploits, but his personality, friendliness and humour made him a great host.

I can highly recommend the Mennabroom Farm Cottages and B&B at Warleggan, near Bodmin PL30 4HE Tel: 01208 821272. There is plenty of info at mennabroom.com

The really great news is that Ian offers a 10% discount for RNA Members if they book direct.



MENNABROOM FARM B&B AND HOLIDAY COTTAGES



French Cruiser submarine FS *Surcouf*

From the Internet

Compiled and edited by Norrie Millen

Part II

According to an article by Alan Donaldson, what precisely happened to the *Surcouf* on that last fatal voyage has remained conjecture ever since. Speculation about sabotage or mutiny was rife at the time but failed to hold up under scrutiny. It seems far more probable, though equally unproven, that she was the victim of a night-time collision with the freighter Thompson Lykes

At 4.40pm, the previous day, the 6,829-ton *Thompson Lykes* with a crew of 43, departed from the Cristobal exit of the Panama Canal and headed for Cuba. She was 418 feet long and 60 feet wide, with a fully loaded draft of 28 feet. Powered by steam turbines, with a single screw, she had 4,000 shp and make 14 knots. On this voyage, she was lightly loaded and drawing 11 feet forward and 27 feet aft. Soon after leaving port, her master, Henry Johnston ordered full speed and the vessel surged ahead at fifteen knots on a heading of 028°.

The ship was just ten months old and owned by the Lykes Brothers Steamship Company of New Orleans. In the wake of Pearl Harbour, the ship had been time-chartered by the US Army and was regularly employed to ferry Army cargo. Johnston had been captain of the ship since it was new and the mate, Andrew Thompson, was a very experienced seaman. Most of the crew, by contrast, were conscripts from the US Army 58th Coast Artillery Transport Detachment and many had never been to sea before and because many of the former crew had been drafted into the US Navy.

On 18 Feb 1942, Johnston wisely chose an experienced seaman for duty in the crow's nest before retiring to his office behind the bridge. As night fell, external lights remained off while internal lights were shielded. America's war was only ten weeks old but already merchant vessels had been sunk by U-Boats and Johnston was taking no unnecessary risks. By 7pm, the brief Caribbean twilight gave way to complete darkness and sea conditions began to deteriorate. In response, Johnston ordered a speed reduction to thirteen knots. One hour later, with the weather worsening steadily, Johnston elected to steer a more direct route and the vessel turned to a heading of 022°. He had no warning of other vessels in the area and the rule of radio silence meant he was unable to seek updates or advice. At 9pm, the radio operator received a coded message which changed their current mission

and ordered the vessel to sail for Cienfuegos instead. The new course on the gyro was 355°.

All remained quiet until 10.28pm when the helmsman, Atwell, suddenly spotted a white light moving up and down on their right side. He immediately reported it to

Thompson who ordered full rudder to port. A short time later, the crow's nest telephone rang, and the lookout reported seeing a light dead ahead.

Thompson, suddenly realising that the unknown vessel was crossing their bows ordered right full rudder, but it was too late. Seconds later, the vessel hit something.

Captain Johnston had rushed back onto the bridge and demanded an explanation but before Thompson could reply, there was a loud explosion and a brilliant momentary flare illuminating both sides of the bow. As the flames died away, Private Dohrman Henke, had a fleeting glance of something white in the water and several crewmen heard people calling for help. Johnston and Thompson, blinded by the sudden light, saw nothing and asked Henke what he had seen. The private replied that he thought they had hit a sub and that it had passed down their port side.

Thompson was sent forward with an inspection crew to check the condition of the bow while Johnston ordered a slow turnaround back to the point of impact. Despite the obvious risks, the searchlight was switched on and crewmen lined the rails with orders to look for survivors and/or wreckage. Thompson returned to the bridge and reported that the damage to the bow of the ship was less than first feared and did not threaten the safety of the ship. This news allowed the search to continue and the Thompson Lykes criss-crossed the area several times in search of survivors, but none were found.

Neither survivors, bodies nor wreckage was found, only a large heavy fuel oil slick. This lack of debris naturally caused the crew to wonder what it was they had hit. They felt certain that it was a vessel of some kind and the helmsman believed that it must have been low in the water else he'd have seen it against the horizon. A few crew members had momentarily seen a long cylindrical shaped object run down the port side of the ship which, when taken together with the above, suggested they had struck a submarine on the surface. Since they had not been notified of friendly vessels in the area, they assumed that the unknown craft was



probably a surfaced German U-Boat engaged in recharging her batteries. Captain Johnston broke radio silence and reported the incident to the naval authorities at Cristobal. In reply, the Thompson Lykes was ordered to remain in the vicinity and continue the search.

There is a lot of speculation about what actually happened to the Surcouf that night. The Captain and crew of the *Thompson Lykes* were certainly convinced that their ship had collided with a submarine. On 19 February 1942, the British Consular Shipping Adviser at Colón, Panama sent the following message to the Admiralty:

French Cruiser-Sub SURCOUF not repeat not arrived. THOMPSON LYKES USA Army Transport northbound convoy yesterday now returned after collision with unidentified vessel which apparently sank at once at 2230R 18th February in latitude 010 degs 40 north longitude 079 degs 30 West. She searched the vicinity until 0830 today 19th February but no survivors or wreckage. Only sign was oil. Considerable bow damage made to THOMPSON LYKES at fore foot.

Three days later this was followed by a second message from the British Consular Shipping Adviser at Colón after he had read statements from the crew of the *Thompson Lykes* and personally examined the damage to the freighter:

(a) United States Ship without lights course 356 degrees at full speed approximately 14 knots. Originally steering for Windward passage but diverted for Cienfuegos, Cuba.

(b) Other vessel not observed until white light flash seen one point to starboard bow about half minute before collision. Wheel put hard to port but before ship answered helm light again seen this time right ahead so wheel reversed hard to starboard engine still full ahead.

(c) Heavy collision very shortly afterwards. On reaching bridge after collision Master stopped engine. While still close on port beam vessel seen sinking with great disturbance of water. Gunner states bow of other vessel thrown up clear of the water before sinking. Calls in English for help were heard by witnesses but their ship carried headway lost contact. Master delayed lowering lifeboats allegedly on account of sea running intending to do so later when party of survivors were located.

(d) Meanwhile shortly after vessel sank violent underwater explosion was felt in United States ship. Having carried her way about half mile ship put back to where Master estimated other had sunk. Searchlight revealed no sign of survivors or wreckage but much oil. Weather described as rather heavy sea fresh wind; visibility not mentioned. United States Authorities informed by W/T. Search abandoned 0830, 10 hours later."

The message also went on to note that the Consular Shipping Adviser did not believe that the collision had been with another surface vessel:

"From personal observations 15 yard distance, nature of damage to US ship points to other not being surface craft, as upper two third stem post and of pole plate not damaged." The crew of the Thompson Lykes believed that they had rammed and sunk a U-Boat. U-Boats were certainly operating in the area at the time - on 16th February three U-Boats (U-156, U-67 and U-129) began operations against oil tankers and shore refineries in the Caribbean. However, none of these U-Boats reported damage following a collision and none were lost. Two U-Boats were destroyed in February, one on the 2nd (the U-581) and one on the 6th (the U-82). But both were known to be destroyed by depth charge attacks in the vicinity of the Azores. No British or allied submarines were lost in February 1942 and only one American, the USS Shark which was lost while operating in the Pacific while on a patrol in the Makassar Strait between the islands of Borneo and Sulawesi. If the Thompson Lykes did indeed ram a submarine, Surcouf is the only appropriate vessel known to have been in the general area and subsequently reported lost.

The unfortunate element is that no survivors, bodies or debris were found. The Surcouf would have had crew present on the bridge, and they would have been wearing life-jackets. Even if they were killed during the collision or drowned before they could be rescued, their bodies should have been found. The graphic and dramatic description given by the crew of the *Thompson Lykes* noted a violent collision followed by an underwater explosion. If this was indeed a badly damaged and sinking submarine, some debris should have been found by the search conducted during the night and at daylight the next day, but nothing was. The relatively light damage to the forefoot of the 6,700 ton *Thompson Lykes* does not seem significant in view of the reported heavy collision with the 3,300 ton *Surcouf*. Surveyors from the American Bureau of Shipping (ABS) examined the *Thompson Lykes* after the incident and issued a report on 25 February 1942. The report noted that the only damage involved several forward frames and plates that had been distorted and a bottom fuel tank holed (which might account for the oil seen on the surface in the area of the collision). ABS recommended that, after temporary repairs, the ship was safe to proceed to New Orleans for further repairs. For the size of the two colliding vessels, this does not seem as serious as one might expect.

At 10.45am next morning, the USS *Tatnall* arrived and both ships were later joined by the destroyer USS *Barry*. Despite their best efforts, no wreckage or survivors were found, and the only sign of the collision remained the oil slick. The *Thompson Lykes* then departed from the area and returned to Cristobal. She arrived there in the mid afternoon of 19 Feb 1942. News that *Surcouf* was overdue arrived later that day.

Examination of the *Thompson Lykes* took place shortly afterwards and the American Bureau of Shipping issued their findings on 25 Feb. They reported that several frames and plates had been distorted and a bottom fuel tank holed. They recommended that, after temporary repairs, the ship should be allowed to proceed to New Orleans for repairs. The damage estimate was \$38,000.

Over the following seven months, a bitter wrangle arose between the Free French on one side and the British and American governments on the other. The Free French continually doubted the official reports of the loss and despite subsequent and detailed enquiry concluded that since neither vessel had been showing lights, then this had been the cause of the accident. The question remains, "did the *Thompson Lykes* sink the *Surcouf*?"

Photographs of the damaged bow of *Thompson Lykes* show a marked twist to starboard and a dent close to the twelve-foot mark which suggests that this could have been caused by the deck of the other vessel. There is little damage above this mark and, given the known draught at the bow of eleven feet, we can deduce that the free board (the height above the surface of the water) of the other vessel was very low indeed - perhaps only a few feet at most. This tends to support the crews contention that they had indeed, collided with a submarine.

No other vessels were reported as lost in the area which further points towards the *Surcouf* as being the victim of this collision. The British Naval Liaison Officer (BNLO) reported that officers in the conning tower of *Surcouf* often used an unshaded light to see the instruments. Could this have been the flashes of light witnessed by crewmen aboard the *Thompson Lykes*? In addition, the position of the collision is approximately where one might have expected *Surcouf* to be.

If the unknown vessel was indeed *Surcouf*, then it may be that she sank quickly with most of the hull intact and with virtually all contents of that hull trapped inside. The fact that no plates were ripped or torn from the *Thompson Lykes* suggests that the hull may have remained intact but, with the gun turret and other vital areas flooded, she could have sunk in this state. Such a view is speculation but would explain why no wreckage or survivors were ever found.

The loss resulted in 130 deaths (including 4 Royal Navy personnel), under the command of Frigate Captain Georges Louis Nicolas Blaison. The loss of *Surcouf* was announced by the Free French Headquarters in London on 18 April 1942 and was

reported in The New York Times the next day. It was not reported *Surcouf* was sunk as the result of a collision with the *Thompson Lykes* until January 1945.

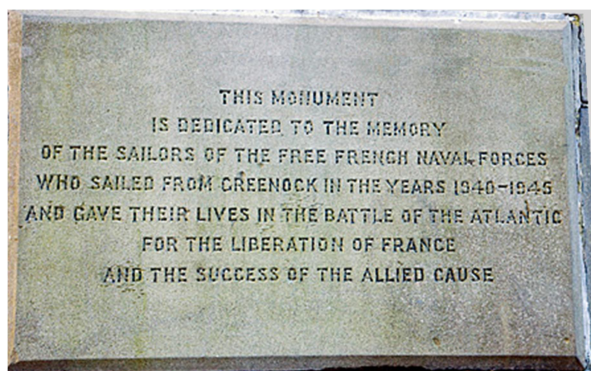
There are significant discrepancies in the story of the *Surcouf*'s sinking. The witness testimonies of cargo ship SS *Thomson Lykes*, which accidentally collided with a submarine, described a submarine smaller than *Surcouf*. The damage to the *Thomson Lykes* was too light for a collision with *Surcouf*. The position of *Surcouf* did not correspond to any position of German submarines at that moment. The Germans did not register any submarine loss in that sector during the war. Inquiries into the incident were haphazard and late. A later French inquiry supported the idea that the sinking had been due to "friendly fire". There is no conclusive confirmation that *Thompson Lykes* collided with *Surcouf*, and her wreck has yet to be discovered.

The rumour mill was rampant after the loss of the *Surcouf*, with one report suggesting that she was caught in Long Island Sound refuelling a German U-boat, and both submarines were sunk, either by the American submarines USS *Mackerel* and USS *Marlin*, or by a United States Coast Guard blimp. Another unlikely story suggests that much of the gold from the French Treasury was in *Surcouf*'s large cargo compartment.

The disappearance of *Surcouf* also gave rise to a number of rumours which claimed that the accident with the *Thompson Lykes* was a cover story used to conceal the fact that the submarine had been deliberately destroyed by the allies. One story claimed that Royal Naval Marine divers placed mines on the hull of *Surcouf* while she was in harbor in Bermuda in early February, and that these were timed to detonate after she had sailed.

Another story claimed that *Surcouf* was attacked and sunk by the American submarines USS *Marlin* and USS *Mackerel* in Long Island Sound. There is a theory that the ramming by the *Thompson Lykes* was deliberate, with the possibility that the *Thompson Lykes* received a coded message instructing it to change course around 1½ hours before the collision. This would make it appear as evidence that the *Thompson Lykes* was deliberately routed towards the *Surcouf*. Another story claims that *Surcouf* was caught re-supplying a U-Boat somewhere south of Cape Cod and she was then attacked and destroyed by a US Navy blimp.

Another theory is that *Surcouf* survived the collision with the *Thompson Lykes* and continued to head for Panama where it was attacked and destroyed by US aircraft which mistook it for a U-Boat.



The activity of a U-Boat group in the area meant that there were certainly large numbers of anti-submarine patrols at the time. A USAAF Consolidated PBV Catalina, patrolling the same waters on the night of 18/19 February, may have attacked *Surcouf* believing her to be German or Japanese. The records of the USAAF 6th Heavy Bomber Group operating out of Rio Hato, Panama show them sinking a large submarine northeast of Columbus on the morning of 19 February 1942. Two Northrop A-17 Nomad and Douglas B-18 Bolo aircraft dropped eight bombs on the submarine. Since no German U-boats were lost in the area on that date, it could have been *Surcouf*. No other submarines were known to be in the area. It is possible that this was *Surcouf* and that it was accidentally sunk by US aircraft looking for U-boats and unaware that it was in the area. It is possible the collision had damaged *Surcouf's* radio and the stricken boat limped towards Panama hoping for the best. It is likely this information that led the French Commission which investigated the incident, to conclude that the *Surcouf's* disappearance was the consequence of misunderstanding. (The story of her being destroyed by US Navy aircraft after the collision seems the most credible in original author's opinion).

There is another theory is that *Surcouf* was not involved in a collision with the Thompson Lykes at all and was instead sunk by a U-Boat. The *U-502* under the command of Kapitän Jürgen von Rosenstiel reported sinking seven ships in February 1942 in the Caribbean. Only six of the ships reported sunk by *U-502* have been positively accounted for. On the night of 14 February, Von Rosenstiel reported an attack on a "2,400 ton tanker" in Square EC9436 (southwest of the island of Aruba and north of the Peninsula de Paraguana, Venezuela). Von Rosenstiel claimed that he watched his target burst into flames and sink rapidly after the attack but this ship has never been identified. All other reports of sinkings by *U-502* are accurate and can be equated with allied losses, but not this one. It is possible that, in the darkness, Von Rosenstiel misidentified *Surcouf* as a tanker and attacked and sank her.

There is, in fact, a memo from FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover to the chief of U.S. Naval Intelligence dated 12 March 1942 stating that a "highly confidential source" had informed him that *Surcouf* had been sunk near St. Pierre. Although he doesn't specify, it is likely that he is referring to St. Pierre in Martinique. The British Naval Liaison Officer (BNLO) had already reported some crew members discussing the possibility of taking her to Vichy French Martinique in order to defect. Unverified speculation suggests that Hoover's source may have been Sir William Stephenson the Canadian head

of British counter-intelligence in North America and the subject of the book "A Man Called Intrepid".

During the war, Hoover wanted the FBI to be more involved in intelligence and counter-intelligence operations. Under Roosevelt several intelligence units came into being, such as the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), in addition to the existing military and naval intelligence operations. Hoover was concerned that these new units might erode the power and influence of the FBI and tried to persuade Roosevelt (unsuccessfully) that there was no need for these new and competing organizations. Because of this, Hoover was generally very careful during the early war period to ensure that any intelligence he passed on came from reliable sources. This points to a senior advisor in the intelligence field, which would suggest someone of Stephenson's stature provided the information.

Note: The Office of Strategic Services (OSS) was formed as an agency of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to coordinate espionage activities behind enemy lines for all branches of the US Armed Forces. Other OSS functions included the use of propaganda, subversion, and post-war planning. The US Army and US Navy had separate code-breaking departments: Signal Intelligence Service and OP-20-G. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) was responsible for domestic security and anti-espionage operations. President Franklin D. Roosevelt was concerned about American intelligence deficiencies. On the suggestion of William Stephenson, the senior British intelligence officer in the western hemisphere, Roosevelt requested that William J. Donovan draft a plan for an intelligence service based on the British Secret Intelligence Service (MI6) and Special Operations Executive (SOE). After submitting his work, "Memorandum of Establishment of Service of Strategic Information", Colonel Donovan was appointed "coordinator of information" on 11 July 1941, heading the new organization known as the office of the Coordinator of Information (COI).

Thereafter the organization was developed with British assistance; Donovan had responsibilities but no actual powers and the existing US agencies were skeptical if not hostile. Until some months after Pearl Harbor, the bulk of OSS intelligence came from the UK. British Security Co-ordination (BSC) trained the first OSS agents in Canada, until training stations were set up in the US with guidance from BSC instructors, who also provided information on how the SOE was arranged and managed. The British immediately made available their short-wave broadcasting capabilities to Europe, Africa, and the Far East and provided equipment for agents until American production was established.

The Office of Strategic Services was established by a Presidential military



**Free French Memorial
on Lyle Hill in
Greenock, Scotland**

order issued by President Roosevelt on 13 June 1942, to collect and analyze strategic information required by the Joint Chiefs of Staff and to conduct special operations not assigned to other agencies. During the war, the OSS supplied policymakers with facts and estimates, but the OSS never had jurisdiction over all foreign intelligence activities. The FBI was left responsible for intelligence work in Latin America, and the Army and Navy continued to develop and rely on their own sources of intelligence.

One extreme theory is that *Surcouf* managed to successfully defect to Martinique and was subsequently attacked and sunk by US aircraft operating from St. Lucia as she tried to make a run for France while being escorted by *U-69* and carrying some of the bullion reserves from Fort Desaix. In this version, *Surcouf* is sunk sometime in May 1942. Given the *Surcouf*'s damaged condition, this seems most unlikely.

No one has officially dived or verified the wreck of *Surcouf*, therefore its precise location remains unknown. If she sank following the collision with the *Thompson Lykes*, then the wreck would lie 3,000 m (9,800 ft) deep at coordinates 10°40'N 79°32'W.

A monument commemorates the loss in the port of Cherbourg in Normandy, France, and the loss is also commemorated by the Free French Memorial on Lyle Hill in Greenock, Scotland.

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Medical experts were asked if it's time to ease the coronavirus lockdown:

**Allergists** were in favour of scratching it, but

**Dermatologists** advised not to make any rash moves.

**Gastroenterologists** had sort of a gut feeling about it, but **Neurologists** thought the government had a lot of nerve.

**Obstetricians** felt certain everyone was labouring under a misconception, while **Ophthalmologists** considered the idea short-sighted.

Many **Pathologists** yelled, "Over my dead body!" while **Pediatricians** said, "Oh, grow up!"

**Psychiatrists** thought the whole idea was madness, while **Radiologists** could see right through it.

**Surgeons** decided to wash their hands of the whole thing and **Pharmacists**

claimed it would be a bitter pill to swallow.

**Plastic Surgeons** opined that this proposal would "put a whole new face on the matter."

**Podiatrists** thought it was a step forward, but **Urologists** were pissed off at the whole idea.

**Anesthetists** thought the whole idea was a gas, and those lofty **Cardiologists** didn't have the heart to say no.

In the end, the **Proctologists** won out, leaving the entire decision up to the assholes. **So politicians are making the decision!**

~~~~~



He who laughs last, laughs lasted



Farewell HMAS Pirie



From the Internet - Submitted by Shipmate Kevin Maquire

As **HMAS Pirie** prepares to decommission, the crew is taking the patrol boat on her final voyage, SGT Dave Morley reports.

As this paper goes to print, **HMAS Pirie II** will have departed Townsville on her final voyage before decommissioning in Darwin on March 27. The Armadale-class patrol boat departed Darwin for Sydney on February 11, and is expected to return to Darwin on March 19, after conducting various port visits.

Navigator Lieutenant Dean Gilbert, who posted to **Pirie** in December 2019, said the decommissioning trip was an opportunity for the ship's company to visit their home towns and families, with most of the crew coming from Townsville, Brisbane, Newcastle and Sydney.

"So far, the support we have received from external agencies like the Patrol Boat Group, Crew Support Readiness Group – North, Port Services (various), MAROPS, COMMHP, to ensure this trip is a success, has been excellent," Lieutenant Gilbert said.

"This trip would not be the success it has been so far without them and we appreciate everything they do for us."

Lieutenant Gilbert said the ship's Townsville visit was an opportunity to show family



HMAS Pirie



HMAS Canberra

his "office".

"It helped them understand why I'm not always around for the big moments.

My little nieces loved it especially," he said.

Local units were also offered tours of the boat.

According to Lieutenant Gilbert the ship's company was excited to undertake the trip as it provided them with an opportunity to visit their families, which was particularly difficult to do in 2020.

"I don't think it has quite settled in yet that, as of April 5, we will no longer be a crew, and **Pirie** has a great reputation for being family-orientated," he said. "I believe that that moment of realisation will come shortly after we arrive back in Darwin and it will be a very sad moment for us all."

ABMT-E (**Greenie**) Darcy Smith, who was raised in Townsville and attended Cathedral School there, posted to Pirie in November 2019. He hosted his parents and brother on a tour of the vessel. His father, Warrant Officer Craig Smith, has been a RAAF aircraft maintainer for 35 years.

"Dad was incredibly proud of my achievements working within a similar technical category as him, but in a different service," AB Smith

said.

“He loved the ship and thought highly of the crew and the ship’s overall capability, including engineering and technical systems.”

When **Pirie** decommissions, AB Smith will post to CSRG-N in a ready role, able to be loaned to other ACPBs requiring his skills as an ABMT-E.

ABML-C Tyler Bawden, who attended Townsville’s Thuringowa State High School, took his in-laws on a tour through the ship.

Having been posted to the ship in July 2020, he said it was incredible to be on board **Pirie** and a great first posting at sea.

“The crew and the routine makes life even better and I feel part of the **Pirie** family,” he said.

“I’m going to miss the culture and the crew mentality we have as a unit; we have an incredibly strong bond as a team and it’s unfortunate we are being split up.”

On **Pirie’s** return voyage she will conduct an in-company departure from Sydney with **HMAS Canberra**, as well as visit Lady Elliot Island off Bundaberg.

Camels get their own traffic signal in China

by Jack Guy CNN submitted by Shipmate Noel Pearman

Officials in northern China have inaugurated what they say is the world’s first traffic signal for camels.

The signal came into operation on Sunday in an area popular with tourists near Dunhuang City, Gansu province, Chinese state media outlet ECNS reported Monday.

Camel-riding tours are a big attraction for visitors to the area,

according to ECNS.

But visitors to the Mingsha Mountain and Crescent Spring will now be safe from camel collisions, thanks to the new traffic signal, which turns green to let the animals cross and red to make them stop.

Mingsha Mountain is also known as Singing Sands Mountain because of the noises the sand makes when walked on.

Dunhuang City sits in an oasis in the Gansu-Xinjiang desert region, and was the first Chinese-administered settlement reached by travelers heading east on the ancient Silk Road.

In recent years, tourism to the area has grown, thanks to the Mingsha Mountain, the Mogao Caves temple complex, and the Yumen and Yangguan passes, which are the westernmost gates of the Great Wall.



The camel signal went into operation recently

££ Treasurer’s Tale ££

By Chris Thomas

Well, I never expected such a quiet time in my first year as Branch Treasurer!

Covid put paid to the regular fundraising opportunities of Babbacombe Fayre; Street Collections; Trafalgar Night; Raffles and Play Your Cards Right. Thankfully, the Branch still managed to make a surplus of £112.43.

The 2020 Accounts have yet to be audited and approved by the AGM, but a provisional copy has been submitted to HQ and Area 4. Here is the summary:

Funds at 1st January 2020:	£4211.38
Income:	£2199.43
Expenditure:	£2087.00
Funds at 31st December 2020:	£4323.81

As of 16th April 2021 our funds stand at £4258.01. The only expenditure so far being our Public Liability Insurance (£128.80), which is a bit ironic given our “lockdown”, but we are obliged to have it. Income this year to date totals £63 from Torbay Lottery, a Subscription and a donation.

Hope to see you all soon.

\$



The camel traffic signal is the first of its kind in the world

Dutch minesweeper HNLMS Abraham Crijnsen

From the Internet

In 1942, crew members of the Dutch minesweeper, HNLMS Abraham Crijnsen, found themselves in a perilous situation.

Can you spot anything out of the ordinary about this photo? It involved a deadly but genius game of hide-and-seek.

The Battle of the Java Sea had been a disaster, with Dutch naval ships and Allied forces suffering heavy losses against the Imperial Japanese Navy.

Following the landing of Japanese troops on Java, 42,000 Dutch soldiers had been taken prisoner and interned. Some were executed on the spot.

Dutch civilians on the island had also been arrested, with some deported to work on the Thai-Burma Railway. The Japanese were forcibly made to work to aid the Japanese war effort.

Following the defeat, the Dutch minesweeper found itself stranded when the three remaining warships were successfully targeted. The only bombs from a Japanese aircraft fall near a Dutch vessel in the Gaspar Strait, 1942.

Remaining safe option was to reach Australia, but to reach safety entailed an unprotected voyage.

Only able to reach 15 knots and with very few guns, the ship was a sitting duck for the Japanese bombers frequently flying overhead.



Can you spot it?



stroke of genius.

Crew members got to work quickly, traveling to nearby islands where they cut down as many trees and as much foliage as they could manage. Hauling it back to the ship, they began constructing a jungle canopy.

The angles of the ship made it impossible to cover the entire surface, so any parts that jutted out were painted to look like rocks. When the ship was sufficiently disguised, it was time to put the plan into action... but there remained one obstacle. Islands don't move.



Concerned that a floating island might gain attention from the Japanese, the crew decided to remain anchored close to other islands during the day and pray they wouldn't be discovered.

With approximately 18,000 islands in Indonesia, this wasn't too difficult.

As darkness fell, the vessel would sail through the night.

It took eight days of painfully slow progress, but the plan worked.

The *Crijnsen* was able to safely reach Australia completely undetected by the Japanese.



Captain John Bowen –Engineer RN (Rtd) – Obituary

Submitted by Shipmate Kevin Maguire

Captain John Bowen, Royal Navy engineer who designed new types of flight-deck catapult

Bowen oversaw the French navy's installation of a catapult system and some of his designs were sold to the US Navy

Captain John Bowen, who has died aged 88, was an expert in the steam catapult and a renowned nautical surveyor.

In 1957-59 Bowen gained his boiler-room watchkeeping ticket, a requirement for all engineers in the age of steam, in the carrier *Ark Royal*, the first ship to be constructed with an angled flight deck, hydraulic arrester gear, and steam-driven catapults.

After some months in the heat of the engine room, he was delighted to become second engineer on the flight deck, in charge of the catapults for launching aircraft. Next he undertook a two-year post graduate diploma course in advance marine engineering design at Greenwich, before service in 1961 in the newly



recommissioned carrier *Victorious*.

When the French navy adopted a catapult system similar to the British for their new carrier *Foch*, Bowen oversaw its installation in 1962-63.

His crash course in French for engineers, and daily practice with his 30-strong Breton workforce, would stand him in good stead later in life.

However, his decision to live in a semi-derelict chateau, with a huge parterre garden, a gardener, and a temperamental central heating stove, was considered eccentric by his hosts, who stayed in married quarters in the town.

In 1963-65 Bowen began an appointment at the Royal Aircraft Establishment, Bedford, home of the Royal Navy's flight deck machinery trials and development facility, where he developed designs of catapults and arrester gear for a new aircraft carrier, CVA01, a ship which was however cancelled.

Bowen rued that his designs were



Bowen, left, showing the latest steam catapult at the Royal Aircraft Establishment, Bedford, the Royal Navy's development facility in 1964.

sold to the US Navy, where they are still in use, and regretted that they were not fitted in the present generation of British carriers. But he was awarded the then enormous sum of £450 from the Herbert Lott Fund for his inventions.

John Thomas Grenville Bowen was born at Havant on June 14 1932; his father was a tax inspector who had flown in the Royal Flying Corps in the First World War.

Young Bowen was educated at Churcher's College, Petersfield, and learnt to sail in Langstone Harbour.

When his father took a retirement job as tax consultant on the Goodwood estate, and gained a paddock pass for all events, young Bowen was intoxicated with the smell of oil developed an appetite for fast cars.

He joined Dartmouth in 1950 and the Royal Naval Engineering College, Keyham, a year later.

While at Bedford, Bowen stumbled into house restorations, starting with a tumbledown cottage at Kimbolton and advancing to a run-down Georgian house in Bath. He was also introduced to sailing Thames spritsail trading barges at Pin Mill, which became a lifelong passion.



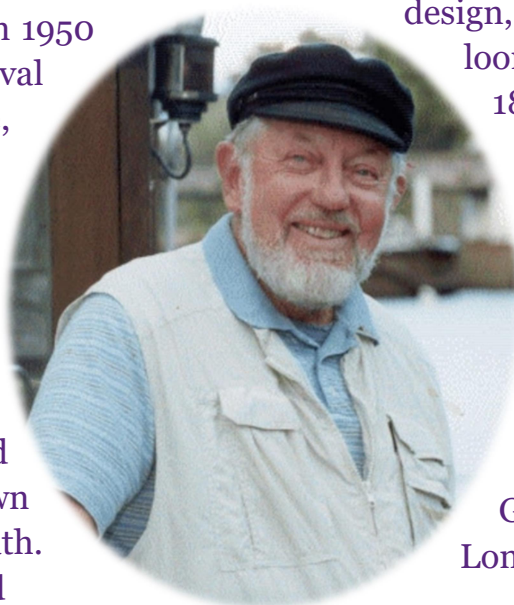
A sea Vixen on raised steam catapult trials, 1963

Thereafter his naval career and moonlighting as a building and boat restorer developed in parallel. The business spread to London when Bowen became head of engineering design at RNEC in Plymouth and visiting professor of design innovation at Greenwich.

In 1972-75, while overseeing naval shipbuilding at the strike-ridden Cammell-Laird's yard on Merseyside, Bowen was introduced to the

Cavern Club, to his second wife, and to canal boats – and when he could find no suitable boat, he built his own, *Richard Trevithick*, named after his Cornish engineering hero.

Bowen was promoted to captain in the navy, but his love of boats, canals, sailing, restoring houses, furniture design, dogs, and his children, loomed larger. He turned an 18th century stables and drydock on the Grand Union Canal into his business centre, raised rare-breed pigs and Aberdeen Angus cattle, maintained and repaired barges, and also rebuilt some 20 Georgian houses in East London.



John Bowen: a bohemian at heart

In 1982-96 he was a director of the South Midland Water Transport, which carried coal by canal

to London. In final strand to his career, Bowen enjoyed an international reputation as a surveyor of boats and barges.

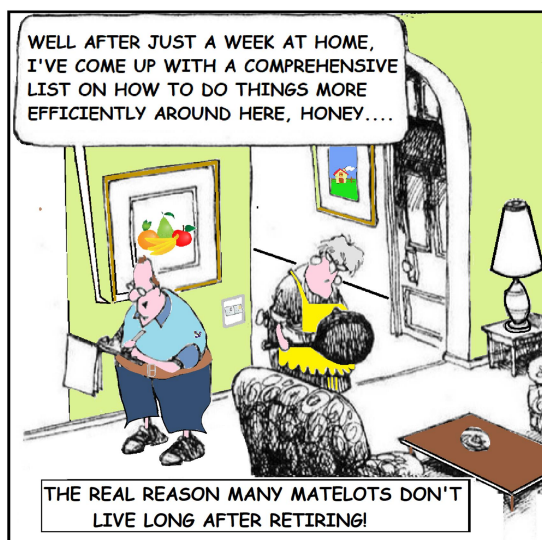
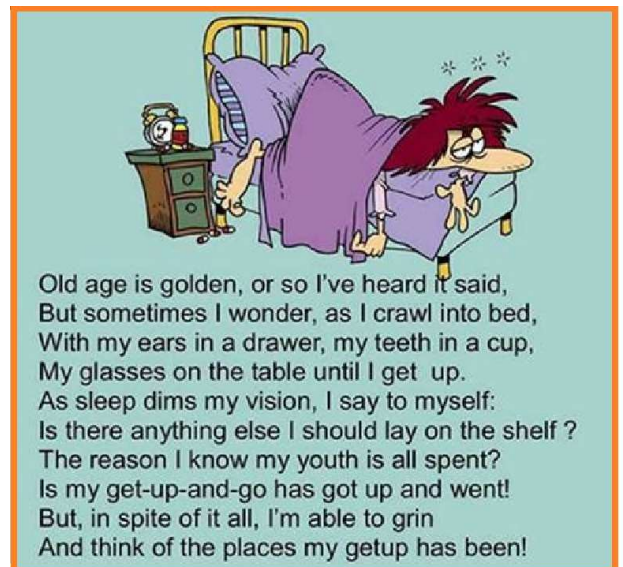
Bowen never retired and was working at his hospital bed, and recovering from an unrelated illness, when he caught Covid and died.

His private life was bohemian: he married Sally Stevens in 1957, and Susie "Wol" Wallis in 1975, and is survived by his partner, Linda McIntyre and by five of his children, a daughter having predeceased him in 2013.

Captain John Bowen, born June 14 1932, died January 10 2021

"Is there any change in my husband, Nurse, since his rejuvenation operation?"

"Yes! he has developed a black eye!"



Commander Rupert Best – Obituary

Submitted by Shipmate Kevin Maguire –published 15th March, 2021

Commander Rupert Best, outstanding midshipman who later commanded the hunter-killer submarine *Courageous*

As a businessman, Best was an ambitious cider-maker who showed his produce at the Bath and West, and he helped revive the port of Portland

Ten COs of *Courageous*, with Best fifth from right

Commander Rupert Best, who has died aged 77, was Britain's most highly decorated midshipman, and a cider-maker who revived Portland harbour.

On the night of December 11/12 1962, after an insurrection had broken out in Brunei, 19-year-old Midshipman Best, while still under training, was made second-in-command of one of two Z-craft or motorised barges, which ferried L company of 42 Commando, Royal Marines, commanded by Captain Jeremy Moore (the future Commandant General Royal Marines), upriver to Limbang in Sarawak.

There, Communist-inspired rebels were holding hostage the district officer, his wife and a dozen others. At dawn, all appeared quiet on the final approach to Limbang, when "all hell let loose". The well-armed insurgents, positioned on rooftops and in trees, fired down on the barges, and the first attempt to land the marines had to be aborted when the petty officer at the wheel was shot.

While Best ran up and down the Z-craft giving out much-needed ammunition and encouragement to the marines, his commanding officer Lieutenant David Willis took the helm, and the second Z-craft held off to give covering fire. Another attempt to land was successful, and, after fierce close-quarters fighting, the rebels were killed or driven off, five marines lost their lives and two ratings were wounded, but all the hostages were rescued.

Willis was awarded the DSC and Moore a bar to his Military Medal, but Best, for his gallantry,

calmness and good humour under fire received a colourful, personal award from the Sultan of Brunei. Thus he returned to Dartmouth for his third year of academic training wearing not only a campaign medal but the exotic Star of Brunei.

Rupert Thomas Nicholas Best was the son of Rear-Admiral Tom Best CB and the New Zealander Brenda Hellaby, and educated at Farnborough school before joining

Dartmouth in 1960. Best could trace his ancestry to William Draper Best, the 1st Baron Wynford and Chief Justice of the Court of Common Pleas, who was a close personal friend of Captain Thomas Masterman Hardy of Trafalgar fame, and one of whose sons had as a midshipman fought under Hardy in the War of 1812.

Best became Senior Sub-Lieutenant at Dartmouth, and volunteered for submarines, seeing service in diesel-powered on special operations in the Arctic in *Sealion*, and on loan service in Australia in the submarine *Trump*. He passed the notorious "perisher" course in 1974 and took command of *Ocelot* 1974-76. Next he served in various nuclear-powered submarines, among them the *USS Groton* which in 1981 was diverted for a special mission. Returning to the Royal Navy, Best commanded the hunter-killer submarine *Courageous*, where after trials of the Harpoon missile in the West Indies, he deployed in May 1982 to join the submarine screen off the Argentine mainland during the Falklands War.

When Best left the Navy in 1989, he won a place as a Sloan fellow at the London Business School before taking over the running of the cider orchards at Hincknowle, Melplash, in Dorset, which his grandfather had bought on return from India in 1921. Planting new orchards, Best raised production to 950 tonnes per annum (or 140,000 gallons), supplying both English and Spanish cideries.



**Ten Courageous C.O.'s
Rupert Best 5th from left**



**Rupert Best enjoying
the Sailing Olympics at
Weymouth 2012**

His mantra was “cider has, in the past, had a poor reputation: if you drink rough cider, you’ll get a frightful hangover, but good, proper cider is on a par with fine wine, to be drunk from a wine glass, with food. And I don’t mean a pasty.”

His family association with the Royal Bath & West Society ran so deep that it was known by some as the “Bath and Best”, and under his leadership the cider exhibition at the show grew from a couple of demijohns of scrumpy on a table to become a significant feature of the three-day show and fill its own "Orchards and Cider" tent.

There, Best’s speeches (which were often overlong, but memorable for his infectious, boyish chuckles) at the annual Thursday night dinner sometimes turned into bun-fights between the ladies of the flower tent and the cider-makers, and once, threatened by a flash flood, led to dancing on the tables.

Best also participated in a “lost and found” project to rediscover old cider apple trees, and the true taste of traditional Dorset cider, his favourite varieties being Golden Ball and Buttery Door. It was natural that he would become master of the 700-year-old Worshipful Company of Fruiterers in 2015.

Besides his farming interests, in 1990 Best was one of three founders of a company which bought Portland port on the

Dorset coast from the Ministry of Defence.

Building on ideas inherited from his father, Best mobilised political and financial support for revitalising whose facilities ranged from dry cargo to bunkering, marine services for cable-laying ships, a prison ship, a destination for cruise ships, the 2012 sailing Olympics, and a national sailing centre.

“I am passionate about Dorset,” Best said. “And Portland has such tremendous potential for good. I’ve been

lucky and I want to pass that on. I’ve had a lot of fun, out of everything, and I’ve never been busier.” He was at work until a few days before his death from cancer.

Having learnt and practised his leadership in the Navy, Best was a compassionate, caring employer, always keen to encourage the younger generation. Though never cautious or reticent, he remained modest about his achievements: nevertheless, he lived life fully and, appropriately for someone of his energy and cheerful enthusiasm, a new tug has been named after him.

A strong family man, he organised large reunions, never forgetting his mother’s family in New Zealand. In 1971 he married the barrister Maggie Murray, who survives him with their two sons and daughter.

Commander Rupert Best, born May 15 1943, died February 3 2021



Inspecting the crop with pride



Rupert Best was passionate about Dorset



If you boil a funny bone it becomes a laughing stock. That's humerus.