

THE ROYAL NAVAL ASSOCIATION

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PATRON OF THE ASSOCIATION: HER MAJESTY THE QUEEN

A Registered Charity - No. 1065290

TORBAY BRANCH Patron :- Admiral Sir David Williams, G.C.B.

UNITY

PATRIOTISM

LOYALTY

COMRADESHIP

"Do You Hear There"

12 December 2002



Recently during the morning passage towards another day facing the glowing screens and wielding a bureaucratic pen, I noticed off to starboard one of our young lady members under way at high speed with an even younger lady in tow on course for a school, outside of which stood a "Lollipop Lady" looking meaningfully at her watch much the way QM's look at gangway clocks! It brought back memories of innocent young gentlemen, stokers, chefs even rough upper deck chaps, (what them innocent?), and assorted others dragged before the table of justice because the QM's clock was dodgy!

Tarried a little too long in an art gallery or cathedral? Delayed by helping old ladies across the teeming thoroughfares of the Wanchai? Lingered too long over a cup of tea and a bun in a "pleasant temperance establishment" down Strait Street, known to some as "The Gut"?

Whatever, just a quiet run ashore, result?..... "Adrift in returning on board!"

Well this mental meandering led me to think the "adrift status" usually results from time passing

un-remarked until suddenly we realise something must, or should have been done like a Newsletter!

The nature of a Newsletter, well this one anyway such as it is, tends to reflect on what has passed in the previous months and in this case almost a year, which suggests this epistle, is at least six months adrift. So? Has anyone noticed?

Our AGM, many months astern, January in fact, saw Bob Dennet elected as Mr Vice, Chairman that is, and John Boakes as Treasurer, and votes of thanks to those retiring from the posts Evelyn Kite and Peter Haywood who we were particularly grateful to for holding the post in addition to his very busy "day and night job".

Margaret Dennet as our Social Secretary has over the year ensured entertainment in the form of very interesting speakers at our Branch meetings, from "Tot Time" in Buckfast Abbey, (really? Well something like that!), through "Cold Wars" both "intellectual and physical", (Espionage and Arctic Convoys), Old Devon Characters, (not all in Torbay RNA), The Air Ambulance and the operation of Exeter Airport, (not necessarily linked), all well presented and we do appreciate the effort Margaret makes to secure good speakers, unfortunately the gangway book records, on occasion, a turn out which, personally, I think does less than justice to the efforts of both the speaker and Margaret! However that's just my view, perhaps not shared by you, however I'm sure you will agree our Social Secretary runs an efficient "Part of Ship"!

What has now become an annual event, "Wine & Wisdom Quiz Night", was a well-supported evening with visitors from other branches and organisations who we, hospitable and generous as ever, allowed to win! A Jubilee social evening was held in May, I was otherwise engaged, ashore on duty that night, however feedback indicated it was enjoyed by all attending, and as always with the excellent catering and back up of the Trecarn staff, a successful event.

Not only but also, there have been "runs ashore"! Skittles matches, quiz nights and Newton Abbot's annual dinner to name but a few.

A number of members enjoyed a visit to Navy Days in Devonport organised, (the coach that is not the actual Navy Days!), by Margaret and by all accounts a good run ashore!

It is understood, during the visit Harold & Barbara enjoyed the facilities of the WO's & Senior Rates Mess and as traditionally with that mess, (of which I have many fond memories, in fact it was my last mess in the service), found it to be most hospitable

Social Secretary Margaret supported by Vice Chairman Bob puts considerable time and effort into organising such events and on behalf of the branch, many thanks for all you do.

Turning to other events ashore, parades and such, that we once knew as "Divisions", brings to mind "Simon the Chef, and a most splendid "Standard Bearer" he is! Again it's not always the easiest task, get it wrong and everyone sees it, however Simon, in the way of the "chosen ones", (Chef s and "Gentlemen Stokers"), doesn't get it wrong , well there was..... no better not mention the zip, after all that which had been left undone was done with the assistance of a passing stranger, an elderly lady I believe, who had pointed out the problem in the first place, well after all the Standard Bearer had his hands full!

This year saw the Annual Mayoral Parade held on a Saturday, that's different! So on that sunny day we marched off from the muster point straight up a fairly steep hill then a considerable distance to the church entrance, a reciprocal course after the service saw us mustered ready for another assault on the hill and the saluting base outside the church, superb planning!

The march past went well, the distance between the top of the hill and the dais allowing a "recovery stage" and so we swung past "Tiddley" as ever, the Sea Cadet Band at "Full Power" a splendid sight, ever onwards down another hill to the halt, except the Sea Cadet Band, who failing to "Obey Telegraphs" thundered on into the distance! A bridge messenger was eventually dispatched to recover the "overboard musicians" to the assembled parade so they might savour along with everyone else the thanks of the great & the good!

In fairness the band played very well as indeed they do on every occasion, however to make a run for it to escape the "civic bleat" can't blame them really!

"President Peter" represented the branch at a parade in Newton Abbot earlier in the year, that was a mid -week occasion for the Jubilee, as indeed was the annual D-Day Remembrance at Torquay Harbour where the branch was well represented.

It was a busy summer for the Standard Bearer with the Royal British Legion (Devon) holding a "mega-parade" on Torre Abbey Meadows again attended by members from Torbay RNA. There was a large turnout of standards mainly British Legion, (it was their party after all), and the weather on the day just right although I'm told Simon and a couple of our contingent found the "breeze a little strong" at times! Following the parade and I understand considerable refreshment a contingent mustered at the War Memorial on the sea front to witness the unveiling of a plaque in recognition of 1939-45 casualties. Considerable work had, and is still going on, to have this enhancement of the memorial done, the branch has had representation on the working party, namely myself, and I have pushed particularly to have recognition also for those who have fallen in service since 1945 in one might describe as "The Wars of Peace".

This is being done and last months Remembrance Parade saw plaques bearing the names of the 39-45 casualties unveiled and the next plaques are in recognition of those since then.

Coming back to the ceremony in June, the branch was again represented by "Simon the Splendid" with our standard, Chairman John, Peter (Guy) Fawkes & myself, slipped out of the office for an hour, it was a brief ceremony but an important moment.

The most important parade of the year of course, (at least in my view), is Remembrance Sunday, which this year dawned bleak and wet, by muster time however the rain had stopped and it held off until the parade was over.

We had a fairly good turnout, "Simon the Standard" to lead, President Peter to lay the wreath, and the Sea Cadet Band at the sharp end leading the whole parade, and they stayed with us!

Talking about Sea Cadets, earlier this year we as a branch instituted a presentation plaque to be awarded every year to the Cadet most improved in that year.

As a branch we were beneficiaries of a small legacy from an ex CERA a gentleman called Harold Love who had served a full career and then gone on as a civilian instructor for a number of years and served in places such as BRNC. Thus came to being the Harold Love Memorial Trophy that was presented for the first time to Sea Cadet Liam Croft, at the units annual inspection.

The inspection was witnessed by the Mayor and I presented the trophy with Guy Fawkes on behalf of the branch. The trophy itself is quite an impressive piece of wood & silver, a shield with a large number of little shields for recipients' names.

The point being made is the branch is fostering the link with the Sea Cadets, perpetuating the memory of someone who served and giving the chance of. small though it may seem, recognition to a youngster trying hard but not necessarily a high flier

In the interests of maintaining links I recently went along to a meeting and gave a training presentation on basic firefighting to the cadet unit based on their task book requirements, it was ironic they were not in their usual meeting place as that had been taken over by the "Green Goddess" units! The units in this area being manned by the RN, quite right too, I have memories of the 1977 strike when as a young (??) Gentleman Chief Stoker I was sent off to deepest Wales with a dozen or so lads and found I had an ammunition depot, an oil refinery and a commercial port on my "slop chit", still I had a red Land Rover pump unit with a bell on it, so that was alright then! I'm glad it never reached the stage when I would have to explain why half of Wales had disappeared!

However, I digress, suffice to say I think Sub Skingle would be happy to have RNA members on occasion go along and assist as, for want of a better expression, guest speakers, so give it a thought.

October saw us holding our annual Trafalgar Dinner in the Trecarn, again although having arranged the event I was unable to attend, and understand I missed a very good evening. An excellent guest speaker in Chris Wreford-Brown, the menu and service, as always from the Trecarn, of the highest standard and good entertainment to round off the night.

The 2003 dinner will be held in the Trecarn on Saturday the 18th of October as part of a Trafalgar Weekend open to all RNA Branches and ex RN/RM individuals nationwide for which arrangements are already in hand, Chairman John and I recently having had a meeting with Bryan Pitman to get planning underway.

The main points concerning the dinner at this time are, there will be "tot time" prior to dinner, a guest speaker and entertainment afterwards at a cost of £16.50 for non-residents.

A Trafalgar Service will be held in the hotel ballroom on Sunday morning 19th October, our member Peter Haywood will lead the service and there are possibilities regarding music for the

service. Having attended services in the Trecarn I can recommend it as a venue and Peter is excellent as a "sin bosun", it will be nice to have a good turn out, and its possible we might be able to arrange Sunday lunch for non-residents if there is a demand.

Talking about lunch, it is intended to hold such an event sometime in the New Year, the committee you may remember decided that to fit a lunch in before Christmas as we usually do was just not possible and at the moment February is looking possible, I expect at the AGM in January more details may be available.

The AGM will be our first meeting in the new venue for branch meetings, the RAFA Club in Scarborough Road, Torquay.

I understand there has been concern over an unbelievable "buzz" our meetings will be held in the bar! Absolute nonsense! I have made arrangements, (following unanimous agreement from members), and reserved the upstairs room, which I understand many of you are familiar with, in the club for all our meetings. The bar facilities will of course be available to us and I'm sure many of us will wish to gather there before and after the meetings however it is fully understood, (and I fail to see how anyone can imagine otherwise), we couldn't possibly envisage holding our meetings in the bar, effectively a public place, wemight as well sit down on the sea front!

Well with the reminder of our AGM on 30th January 2003 at 1930 in the RAFA Club I think that just about brings this effort to a close, dawn breaks and soon I must embark on the morning passage! Incidentally talking about the AGM the position of Branch Treasurer requires a volunteer, YOU! I am currently Local Acting in the post, John Boakes having left the area, however that is very much a temporary measure, "damage control to keep the branch afloat", however I do not intend this as a long-term position, think about it please!

Finally on behalf of "President Peter", ñChairman John" the Committee and all Torbay members may I wish all our friends and RNA members at home and worldwide a very happy and peaceful Christmas and prosperous New Year, and may you never be adrift!

Acknowledgement

I am grateful to our young lady member, (and Cockington School!) .for "flashing up the word boiler' & providing a thought with which to start this effort!

I 'm very grateful to Peter (Guy) Fawkes. who tells me he was ships company on the Victory before it was dry-docked, for providing the bones of the following, very "Rough Upper Deck Chap " sea story.

"An Appointment With Fear"

Malta, Grand Harbour, Mid 50's still and quiet, well yes at 0400 it was and no more so than on the gangway of one of HM's cruisers, where the watchkeepers, three badged & bold veterans of WWII & Korea, one a bootie, having just relieved the Middle Men are settling to the watch in the traditional "rough upper deck chaps" manner "mug of kai & a woodie".

Heroes indeed straight from the front of a Players packet, oh and of course not forgetting, under their care, the Officer of the Gangway , a young National Service, straight from the fields of Eton, and the bosom of Dartmouth Sub Lieutenant, aaaah !

The hands of the gangway clock move relentlessly on and as they do a chill creeps over our "ruffy -tuffy" heroes, the woodbines are puffed a little harder, the air of "I'm Jack me -feed pump" nonchalance seems to be slipping, and in the words of the great Robert Burns , "Nae man can tether time nor tide ; the hour approaches Tarn maun ride" (1) . Perhaps our heroes

would have preferred the perils of Tam O'Shanter's ride through the haunted countryside to what they were about to face!

Two of their number are chosen and clad in protective watchcoats armed with deck scrubbers the chosen men, Bootie and the Bosun's Mate, set out on a perilous journey forward and deep down into a place of stygian blackness, full of strange noises, grunts, evil chuckles, a place of sudden winds with indescribable odours carried on the breeze, emanating mainly from overhead, an area which appears to be a grey lumpy heaving mass, like thunderclouds below the deckhead!

The brave souls from the gangway watch steeling themselves, very carefully select specific "lumps" from overhead, and for want of a better expression, disturb them.

A scene such as might have been from the dawn of time then unfolds, Neanderthal like creatures begin to emerge from the lumps dropping on to the deck creeping into what appears to be hard shiny shells, all the while grunting, scratching, coughing, simultaneous with lighting a woodbine and emitting thunderous posterior blasts such as would make the eyes of an elephant water!

The heroic pair quickly retreat and scramble their way back to the gangway, the shakes have been done the duty chefs have dropped out of their hammocks into stiff sets of No8s and steaming boots and gone off to the galley, a hazardous task, well done!

Now as the watch draws to its end and the sun comes up over the casements surrounding Grand Harbour the gangway watch can look forward to that special time unique to the Andrew, Morning Watchkeepers Breakfast!

Following breakfast, "bath & dhobey" and the first liberty boat they are off for a well-deserved run ashore the horrors of the night soon forgotten in the pleasant surroundings of, Strait Street was it? Well perhaps we'd best drop the deadlights over that, after all we are talking about "rough upper deck chaps" and just how much horror can one take well, you could be adrift!

An "Old Guy" with the assistance Of An "Innocent Stoker", Torbay

1) Tam O'Shanter by Robert Burns 1759 -1796.

Finally, have you ever wondered why in fast food outlets people order double cheeseburgers with mayonnaise, large fries, double chocolate fudge cake anddiet coke?

Still not to worry, the future will be better tomorrow!!!!

