



## The Rum Tub or Norrie's Nocturnal and Nautical Natter

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Back and forth . . . .

Back and forth . . . .

In and out . . . .

In and out . . . .

A little to the right.

A little to the left . . . .

She could feel the sweat on her forehead . . . . Down her chest. .

And, trickling down the small of her back . . . . She was getting near to the end.

He was in ecstasy with a huge smile on his face as his wife moved . . . Forwards then backwards. Forward then backwards. Again and, again . . .

Her heart was pounding now . . . .

Her face was flushed . . . . She

moaned . . . softly at first, then began to groan louder . . . .

Finally . . . . totally exhausted . . . . she let out a piercing scream . . .

She shouted: "OK, OK, you smug b\*\*\*\*d, I can't parallel park. You do it!"

# HMS Ulster

## Rum Tub

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### Editorial

By Shipmate Norrie Millen



Hi! Shipmates,

You would have thought when Torbay Council decided to grant the Freedom of Torbay to the crew of HM S/M Torbay that one of the first people to be invited to participate would be the local RNA Torbay. Given the fact, we are the only naval association in Torbay (*unless you include RNA Brixham*) and our close liaison with the submarine over the years since she commissioned, begs the question "What were they thinking?" or were they thinking at all!

Speaking to some of our members at RNA Torbay, 50% of whom are ex-submariners; I can fully understand the frustration and anger this has caused and I personally do not intend to let the matter rest. My major shortcoming is I have low diplomatic skills and prefer to call a spade a shovel. You might say I am one-faced!

The most important point though was that the RNA missed a massive golden opportunity to broadcast our presence and the chance for some free PR and recruiting advertising. It would have been nice to form up at the end of the march (30 minute parade through length of Torquay too far for our members) with our Branch Standard flying to welcome the submarine crew at same time letting general public know of our presence?

The Normandy Vets were invited (majority ex-army) and could not understand why the RNA had been excluded but even an appeal at the 11<sup>th</sup> hour fell on deaf ears.

I am a strong believer in the pen is mightier than the sword and often write a 'shittygram' to organisation CEO's that have not given me a good service – it works believe me. Having said that, local RNA Chairman has advised that one letter to local Herald newspapers should suffice which he will write. (Many do not agree)

Changing subject completely, I was watching the memorial service for Lord Mountbatten in Ireland a few weeks ago and in some historical pictures of Mountbatten noticed he was sporting a set of Dolphins' I checked his naval career history and he was a Signals or Communications specialist and at no time according to sources I have checked served on submarines. Can any of you (especially our submariners) throw any light on this? Often people sport something they are not entitled to wear.

*The way I see it anyway!*

## Stuff Shirt Attitude

*By Norrie Millen*

**You may recall** in last issue, I had mentioned an amusing (to me) anecdote of an incident related to Shipmate John Soanes article about Admiral Pellew.

**For many years,** Teignmouth's adopted ship was HMS Pelly, which would visit Teignmouth every year for the regatta, often accompanied by HM S/M Solent.

**The day arrived** when *Pellow* was being withdrawn from service and placed on the disposal list, leaving Teignmouth without an adopted ship.

**The town council** wrote and asked for another ship to adopt, but alas, there were no ships available and the MOD (N) informed local council of this. They being a little narrow-minded and being rather silly threatened to invite the Russian Navy (Still Cold War days), thinking that this would encourage MOD (N) to come up with a British ship.

**The best MOD (N)** could do was to organise a Dutch minesweeper squadron along with their support ship to fill the gap. As in all ships visits the world over, cocktail parties, ship open to visitors and children's parties were arranged. The CO of the squadron requested that local council come up with some guest names including female guests for the official reception and cocktail party. This was well in

advance of the actual visit.

**Someone from local council** (I cannot remember who after all these years) wrote to local paper a scathing article which basically indicated we (Town) were not a brothel service for visiting navies and no guests would be attending official reception on ships arrival.

**Quick with the quill**, I dashed off a letter stating that council had a 'Stuffed Shirt Attitude'. The ink was hardly dry on the newspaper when around 0630 following morning, (luckily I had the Morning Watch LOL) there was loud banging at the front door. It being on a lower level we were able to see who was banging from our balcony. There waving his medals and shouting abusively was a council member, who obviously took exception to my article. Told him to go away and behave himself.

Presently, I am trying to make friends outside of Facebook while applying the same principles.

Therefore every day, I go down on the street and tell the passer-by what I have eaten, how I feel, what I have done the night before, and what I will do after, I give them pictures of my family, my dog and me gardening and spending time in my pool.

I also listen to their conversations and I tell them I love them.

It works: I already have 3 persons following me: 2 police officers and psychiatrist.



# China Fleet Club - Post War Years

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

**COMMANDER C.S.B. HICKMAN**, the former Secretary and Treasurer of the Club, who had been a prisoner-of-war, had volunteered to stay on in Hong Kong to assist with the reorganisation of the base and advise on the future of the Club. He felt that the N.A.A.F.I. with their greater resources should run the Club



Committees would vote funds to help rehabilitate the Club. Admiralty was then approached for a loan of £10,000 for this purpose, but regretted that they could not provide financial assistance since it was the policy in wartime for N.A.A.F.I. to run Service

for a year while it was getting back on its feet.

**The China Fleet Club in the 1950's**

clubs.

**This feeling was** not generally supported and a meeting of representatives of all the ships present was held in the Club on Saturday 6th October 1945. The Flag Officer, Western Area, opened the Meeting personally, and explained the position of the Club before the war. He particularly stressed the importance of any decision made by Officers and Men present at the meeting. Their decisions would affect not only the welfare of their ships then in harbour, but the whole future of the China Fleet Club. Admiral Fisher then turned the meeting over to Commodore D.H. Everett, C.B.E., D.S.O. The Chairman explained the duties of the Committee which had assembled at Flag Officer Western Area's direction.

(a) That the Committee should be the Port Canteen Committee and deal with the China Fleet Club in addition to its other duties.

(b) That the Committee should merely be the emergency Committee of the China Fleet Club.

**These proposals** were voted on and the second was carried on the casting vote of the Chairman.

**After further meetings** and discussion it was unanimously felt that the Club should be run as pre-war: "by the Fleet for the Fleet". It was hoped that voluntary work would be done by ships' companies and that Canteen

**Following that news** the sub-committee issued a report on Saturday 13th October saying:

"If the Admiralty will do the same for the Fleet Club as they will do for N.A.A.F.I., and the Commander-in-Chief will give shipping space for the Club, similar to that given to N.A.A.F.I., it seems practicable for the Fleet to run the Club". With this report adopted, a General Committee was formed, and the Club was back in action.

**The N.A.A.F.I. had started** selling beer in mid-September, although that was rationed to 11000 bottles a day. Tickets were allocated to each ship and beer sold to the lucky ticket holders.

## The kitchen and restaurants

were the first to receive attention by the "volunteer force" and started serving meals at the beginning of November.

Towards the end of November local beer came on the market and sales increased by leaps and bounds, though spirits were



**Junior Rates Restaurant**

not available until Christmas the following year.

**The China Fleet Club** was back in business!

The following years saw a marked improvement in the financial state of the Club and redecoration, refurbishing and

modernisation were the order of the day. It had been feared in 1948, that a reduction of income would come with the reduction of the Fleet, and Singapore becoming the Far East Naval Headquarters. But then the "Korean situation" blew up at the beginning of the fifties, and the Club found itself looking after large numbers of naval (including allied) personnel.

**In 1952 the land between the Club and the Missions to Seamen** was purchased for HK\$230,250, and the building erected there became known as the Coronation Annex. It was opened on the 5th April 1954 by Rear Admiral G.V. Gladstone, C.B. The total cost of the annex was \$861.068, which involved a considerable overdraft at the bank. But with typical farsightedness, good business soon cleared the overdraft.

**The ground floor of the Annex** was a large godown, which was initially rented to San Miguel Brewery. It served as their Hong Kong depot for seven years until 1961, when San Miguel had to move to the New Territories when the Club was forced to terminate the lease due to reclamation of the land in front of the Club. It was too difficult to transport beer across the harbour once the junks no longer had direct access to the godown.

**On the first floor** a four-lane bowling alley was installed and was immensely popular. The 2nd floor contained the Club's shopping arcade and the 3rd, 4th and 5th floors, Chinese Staff Living Quarters. The 6th floor contained the laundry.

**It was in 1954, too,** that the United States Navy Purchasing Branch approached the Club with the idea of opening a Purchasing Branch for American personnel visiting Hong Kong for recreation. Eventually the third floor of the main building was leased exclusively to them. The floor had previously contained dormitories, but with the reduction in the size of the British Fleet in the Far East, it was rarely used to capacity. The extra income was just what was needed at that point in time.

**1955 saw that well** known San Miguel Brewery neon advertising sign go up on the

roof, at that time, the largest in Hong Kong. "Long John" Whisky added their neon sign in 1960 -more income for the Club!

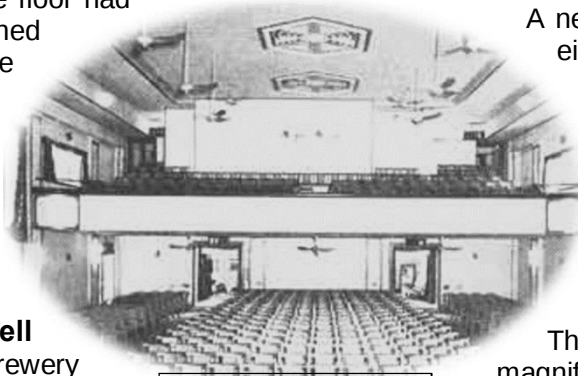
**Renovation and redecoration** continued yearly. In 1961 the exterior of the Club got a new coat of paint and colours. Desert Sand with Terracotta Bands. The 25th Anniversary of the opening, on 21st March 1959 was celebrated at a cocktail party in the presence of Sir Robert Black, the Governor of Hong Kong, Admiral Sir G Gladstone, Commander-in-Chief, Far East Station, Lt. Gen. Sir E Bastyan, Commander, British Forces, Hong Kong and Air Commodore T Holder, Air Officer Commanding, Hong Kong. Sir Michael Turner, Chief Manager of the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank, and a Trustee of the Club was present together with the Honourable Hugh Barton, Managing Director of Jardine Matheson, and also a Trustee of the Club. The Commissioner of Police Mr A.C. Maxwell attended and Commodore G.D.A. Gregory, Commodore-in-Charge, Hong Kong and its Senior Trustee. Commanding Officers of all H.M. Ships in Port, Ratings from those Ships, the General Committee and others connected with the Club were there to help celebrate.

**During the installation** of air conditioning in 1964 a live shell was found two feet below the Reception Room on the Ground Floor. The shell, Japanese, weighing 83 lbs and 30 2/5 long, was removed by the Police Ballistics division. Doubtless it had landed in the Club during the battle for Hong Kong back in 1941.

**By the mid-sixties** the balconies on the first and second floors had been glassed in, and together with air-conditioning of all the lounges and bars this added a considerable amount of space in the Club. Around that time the theatre, which was also used as a cinema, was closed down and completely gutted.

A new floor was built, and an eight-lane bowling alley was installed on the ground floor and an air-conditioned dance-cum-tombola hall on the upper floor. Two new automatic lifts replaced the old manually operated ones.

That project cost the magnificent sum of HK\$1,300.000. It was opened by



**Fleet Club Theatre**

H.E. The Governor, Sir David Trench on 21st September 1965.

**THE VIETNAM WAR**, however tragic, meant virtually a decade of "boom" years for the Club. American and Allied personnel used Hong Kong exclusively for "Rest and Recreation", and the Club, on the edge of ever-popular Wanchai, prospered. And with prosperity came plans for a new Club.

**During 1970** the General Committee decided that the present Club accommodation was becoming outdated and expensive to run and maintain.

**Meetings were held** with, sometimes, monotonous regularity. But as recession reared its ugly head, and Defence Cuts came into force it was finally decided in early 1976 to remain in the old building.

**It was another three years** before the possibility of rebuilding was raised again, in 1979. When the future of the Services in Hong Kong had been confirmed, the Trustees met to discuss the Club's future. It was felt that the Club was well patronised by the Navy and their families and also by visiting RN and Commonwealth ships and that its facilities were undoubtedly very popular with everyone.

#### **The New Club 1980 - 1992**

**EARLY 1980 BROUGHT** the next step towards redeveloping the Club and it was decided to go to Tender for a new Club on its present site, the winning Tender to provide temporary accommodation for a period of 3.5 years. Four companies tendered, with Sun Hung Kai coming out the winner. Although Sun Hung Kai later withdrew their tender, they allowed the offer of temporary accommodation to stand. Hong Kong Land then offered to take on the redevelopment, and this was accepted.

**The temporary Club**, situated in Sun Hung Kai Centre was very successful, if with somewhat reduced facilities, for members. Nevertheless, long-standing favour rites like Tombola, Folk Shows, and of course Mollie's Music Hall, continued to make their appearance.

**The new Club** was opened by H.E. Sir Edward Youde G.C.M.G., M.B.E., the then Governor of Hong Kong, on 31st May 1985 and

occupied the first nine floors of Fleet House, a 25 storey building in Wanchai, on exactly the same site as its predecessor.

**The Club contained** a magnificent array of facilities and was fitted out at a final cost of some \$43,000,000. The facilities included (from the ground floor up), a Reception area for hotel bedrooms, a multi-purpose Auditorium, Jewellery, Naval Tailor and Gift shops, three bars, a splendid restaurant with seating for approximately 200 people two squash courts, a Bowling Alley and Snooker room and two floors of accommodation totalling 38 en-suite bedrooms. Also provided were a Ladies and Gents Hairdresser, a Video library/souvenir shop and two floors of 50 shops leased to the United States Navy Contracting Department.

**No expense had been spared** during the fitting out period. From the elegant marble floors of the foyer to the real leather armchairs in the Kelly Bar, everywhere was evidence of sheer luxury.

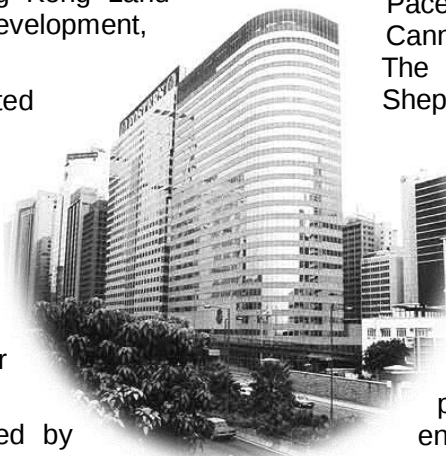
**The Club** continued its previous role of playing host to visiting warships of NATO friendly Nations, and over the following years thousands of sailors from all over the world made it their first port of call in Hong Kong.

**Thanks to the foresight** of the architects and the project management team, the Club was able to be a little more ambitious with regard to the production of shows in the Auditorium. Consequently, besides the perennial Mollie's Music Hall and plays by local drama groups the Club now attracted performers from around the world. Among those to appear were The Drifters, Max Boyce, Billy Connolly, Gerry & The Pacemakers, The Searchers, Cannon & Ball, Jim Davidson, The Supremes, Danny La Rue, Shep Woolley, The Stylistics and The Barron Knights. The list went on and on and the shows invariably played to packed houses.

**The China Fleet Club** was functioning as it was always intended, to provide a service and entertainment to the Men of

the Fleet.

**The ever-popular**



**The Fleet Club 1980's**

Tombola sessions continued twice a week, attracting members of all denominations, many of whom had come along regularly since the end of the war. Some almost certainly still seeking their first house snowball!

**Membership was extended** to include a wider selection of the local community and at one point stood at some 2,500 Associate Members. This meant that the restaurant and bars were invariably filled to capacity and business was brisk indeed.

**In early 1987** came the dramatic news from London that it was intended to withdraw the RN from Hong Kong by 1992. It was at this point that the Trustees began considering the future of the Club, taking into account the certainty that; in any event, it could no longer operate after 1997. After much discussion at many meetings it was decided that there was little choice but to investigate possible sale of the building. This was done, first with the Hong Kong Land Company, the building developers, and later by Tender to all interested property groups in Hong Kong. When the tenders were opened later in the year an offer of HK\$160,000,000 with 5 years rent free occupation of the Club floors of the building was on the table, and after much deliberation by the Trustees, was accepted. The effective date of the sale and lease back was 28th December 1987.

**The China Fleet Club** now had some £11,000,000 in the coffers. The next big question was what to spend it on.

**Throughout the whole of 1988** the subject was discussed around the committee table and gradually a plan to build another China Fleet Club in the U.K. began to take shape. Location was the biggest problem but eventually a suitable site was found in Saltash in Cornwall, just across the Tamar Bridge from Plymouth. Architects and project planners were engaged to present their ideas and work began with the ground breaking ceremony on 14th April 1989.

**It became clear** to those of us who had known the Club in Hong Kong for so long that the name **CHINA FLEET CLUB** would live on.

**Meanwhile back in Hong Kong** there was still much to be done. The Club continued its business of providing a friendly haven for the sailors and their families from H.M.S. Tamar and the patrol craft and also to the many visitors from around the world.

**Gradually time slipped away** however, and in late 1991 and the early months of 1992 the Trustees investigated ways of saving the Club in Hong Kong. Many options were explored and one by one were rejected, until it became apparent that without the support of a wealthy benefactor there was no hope of keeping the Club open. If the Club was to remain after 27th December 1992 it would have to pay floor rental charges equivalent to something in the region of HK\$4,000,000 per month. This sum was simply beyond the financial resources available and could not be recouped from the day-to-day business of the Club. It was therefore decided on 24th June 1992 that the Club would close, in accordance with a previously arranged contingency plan, on 30th November 1992.

**The death knell had been sounded.** A magnificent chapter in the history of the navy in Hong Kong was coming to an end.

**As many thousands** of Sailors will testify, Tombola at the China Fleet Club was synonymous with a run ashore in Hong Kong. It was perhaps fitting then that the last programmed event to be held in the auditorium was a Grand Tombola evening on Sunday 29th November. It was 'empty the coffers' time of the snowball fund which had been built up over the years by the regular players.

And so to the last day. That well-worn cliché "end of an era" was never more appropriate than in these circumstances. The China Fleet Club, which had been a national landmark in Hong Kong for nearly 60 years, had closed its doors for the last time.....

**Eds Note:** When I was based in HK on HMS Loch Killisport, my run ashore oppo would use the Tombola like we use a bank machine today. He had such luck that on checking his wallet and being short of funds he would say óI am a bit short, better go for a game of Tombola at the China Fleet Clubô He always won, luck of the devil.

My mother-in-law's comingë I had to clear out half my closet so she could have a place to hang upside down to sleep!

## HM SM Torbay – Freedom of Torbay

*Extracted from Herald & Express by Norrie Millen with kind permission of the newspaper*

**HMS TORBAY** has been granted the Freedom of the Borough. More than 100 sailors from the submarine marched through Torquay town centre this morning as part of the ceremony. Commander Dan Knight, HMS Torbay, received the honorary Freedom of the Borough of Torbay at the traditional ceremony.

It began outside the town hall by a parade of the crew from the town hall with ceremonial guard, platoons and the Royal Marines' Band. The sailors marched from the town hall, down through Union Street and Fleet Street, along the Strand before circling around the clock tower. The event finished with a salute returned by the council outside the war memorial.

Commanding Officer - Commander Knight said: "Our ship's company and I, and our predecessors over the past 28 years, are immensely grateful to the Torbay community for the support shown."

"Not only to HM S/M Torbay, but to the Royal Navy as a whole throughout this great borough's history. Today is a wonderful celebration of that support."

"As submariners, we routinely spend long periods away from home, at sea, conducting tasks that we can't readily discuss, isolated from our friends and family."

"Those working conditions are made all the more tolerable by the knowledge that we have the support of both our families, and the wider community we serve."

"Today is important because it is a clear demonstration of our commitment to you, and your commitment to the people that serve you."

HMS Torbay was officially recognised as an affiliate of the Borough of Torbay in 1989.

Since then, the submarine has maintained strong links with many associations including sea cadets and RNA Torbay. The crew also take part in Torbay remembrance ceremonies and work with charities and schools.

Mayor Gordon Oliver presented Commander Knight with the Freedom of the Borough of Torbay scroll at the ceremony.

He said: "I am delighted that Commander Knight and his crew have found time in their busy schedule to come here today, visiting schools and charities across the Bay."

"It is therefore a great honour to present this honorary Freedom of the Borough of Torbay to

Commander Knight on behalf of HMS Torbay. You risk your lives to protect us so we sleep at night knowing we are safe."

"On behalf of the people of Torbay, from the bottom of our hearts, we say thank you."

If quizzes are quizzical, what are tests?

Don't take yourself seriously, No one else does



Chief Petty Officer Jim Tozer serves on board HMS Torbay and

lives in Torquay. He said: "Having been in the Royal Navy for 16 years it is a special occasion for me to be able to parade through my home town. Events like today are becoming rarer and it will stand out in the memories of everyone involved as an exceptional event."

Chief Petty Officer



Neil Abraham, also of Torquay, said: "I am proud to be representing the Royal Navy in my home town and it is extra special to me that my family can come and watch the parade through the streets."

The Freedom of the Borough historically gives the crew the right to bear arms in the borough

#### Online funnies

óI did not see HM S/M Torbay in the bayô

óNo because it is a submarine!ô

óWhy did the submarine not come to Torbay?ô

óBecause Mayor Gordon Oliver has installed underwater parking meters!ô



Wouldn't it be great if we could put ourselves in the dryer for ten minutes and come out wrinkle-free and three sizes smaller!

#### Florida woman stops alligator attack with a small Beretta pistol.

This is a story of self-control and marksmanship by a brave, cool-headed woman with a small pistol against a fierce predator. What is the smallest calibre that you would trust to protect yourself? A Beretta Jet-Fire testimonial. Here is her story in her own words:

"While out walking along the edge of a bayou just outside of Fort Lauderdale in alligator alley with my soon to be ex-husband, discussing property settlement and other divorce issues, we were surprised by a huge 12-ft. alligator which suddenly emerged from the murky water and began charging us with its large jaws wide open. She must have been protecting her nest because she was extremely aggressive. If I had not had my little Beretta Jetfire .25 calibre pistol with me, I would not be here today!

Just one shot to my estranged husband's kneecap was all it took.... The 'gator got him easily and I was able to escape by just walking away at a brisk pace. It is one of the best pistols in my collection! Plus the amount I saved in lawyer's fees was really incredible."

My sex life is like a Ferrari  
I don't have a Ferrari!

Men have feelings too.  
For example, we feel hungry

## Silkie's Story

### Escape from Behind the Iron Curtain

"You are never strong enough that you don't need help."

-César Chávez

I had promised Part II of Silkie's story, but I think *the to be continued* referred to other stories at the hospital, so instead here is Silkie's own story.

I was born long after the wall known as the Iron Curtain was built, splitting Germany into East and West. As an East German, I lived under an oppressive regime. I grew up thinking I would never be free to speak my mind or travel. We could not visit relatives in West Germany because the Communist Government knew we might defect. Officially the wall was built to keep the 'enemies' out, but everyone knew it was to keep East Germans captive.

Many people tried to escape. Some were successful, but many were killed in the attempt. Never in my wildest imagination did I think that my parents would risk attempting to leave. Why did they want to start a new life at forty? The answer was simple – Freedom.

Our first escape attempt began discretely. In the summer of 1978, we prepared for our vacation as usual. We travelled along the Danube in Romania until we reached a campground. I had been asleep for several hours when soft voice woke me. I realized my uncle was there. Eager to see him I almost jumped out of bed when what I heard froze my veins. My parents were planning an escape from East Germany! I lay still afraid to breath. The next morning, my mother said, "Silke look who came to visit us" I acted surprised and even more so when they told me what I already knew.

We observed the river for a few days looking for a spot to swim safely across to what was then Yugoslavia. This was no small feat, but eventually found what we thought was the perfect place. Later when we decided, it was time to go I was so afraid that my uncle gave me medicine to calm me.



The dose was too much for my young body. I became so groggy that our plan had to be aborted. The miscalculation had a fortuitous result-that night the moon was full. It would have allowed the border patrol to spot us easily. Sadder but wiser, we headed home to East Germany.

We tried again two days later, but it was impossible to get in the water without being shot at by the shore patrol. We understood we would not escape that year. It was hard living in East Germany after that, having almost tasted freedom.

We continued planning our escape. We trained to swim the Danube's cold three kilometers. We studied the almanac to plan our vacation by a new moon. Lucky for us we had our cabin at the lake, which meant we could take our fins and swim for hours without anyone suspecting. When it got cold, we swam in our local public pool.

Our time finally arrived. We behaved as normally as possible around friends and family before leaving for our supposed vacation. By the end of summer, we would be free! With hearts pounding we drove away.

My uncle met us in Orsova, and we camped close to the Danube. Some fellow campers joined us, and mentioned the border patrol shot at people and left them in the water to break for shore-if they managed to survive the bullets! I was scared to death.

On the night of July 19th, my uncle drove us to a bay. He continued on to a hotel where his room faced the bay, an important detail since he'd signal us when it was safe to start. We sat for hours waiting for darkness and our signal which would be Uncle Dietmar standing on the balcony with his arms outstretched.

I was delegated the task of crawling up the bank to check for his signal. This was a

huge responsibility for a fourteen-year-old. It was life or death for my family, and the gravity of it was palpable. My guardian angel led me to the correct window.

Crawling back to my parents, I told them we could leave. Even in July, the Danube is frigid, so my mother rubbed thick skin cream on everyone's arms to shield us from the cold. Entering the water, we set out for freedom. I had no fear; in fact, I had no feelings at all. I felt like we were in a trance, running on pure adrenaline. We swam smoothly, making few waves, my mother to my left and my father to my right. It was quiet, eerie, and unreal.

We had fresh clothing tied to our backs with important documents wrapped in plastic. As we swam, our clothing got heavier and heavier. This wasn't our only problem. At the halfway point, a Romanian patrol boat appeared with its searchlight probing. Reflexively, I whispered, "Dive!" When we surfaced, the searchlight came around again, so we dove a second time. The patrol boat moved on. We were too close for its beam to target us.

Just when we thought we were home free, we spotted lights moving in front of us. A ship! Had our timing been different by mere minutes, we would likely have been caught in its propeller. Thanking God, I swam on, praying my legs would hold out. My mother must have noticed my exhaustion, because she dragged me the last few meters to shore.

We made it! We were alive and free! Our newfound freedom didn't last long. A barking border patrol dog and its handler came out of the brush. The guards ordered us in Russian not to move. I can still hear my mother begging them not to shoot us. They bound our hands with heavy cords, then pushed us through the brush toward the road, to begin walking, soaking wet, to the nearest detention station.

At the station, the guards offered us dry clothes, hot tea, and aspirin. Soon, we had warmed up enough for the captain to interrogate us. He kept us up all night with questions and sent some officers to the river to check for

accomplices. My uncle was questioned regarding his identity, but no one asked my mother her maiden name, a connection that linked them.

The next day we went to the city station for further questioning. Another station. More questions. They were going to separate us. Our captors thought we were strangers until after almost a day's worth of discussion, they understood we were a family. Finally, they placed us in one cell. At least we were together.

The police chief decided my mother and I should stay at a hotel. We were assigned a third floor room because the chief said if we were crazy enough to swim the Danube, we were crazy enough to jump out the first floor window. A movie theater across the way helped us tell time. We figured the evening show started at 8 pm. Every now and then, the police chief brought my father to see us and to shave and shower. Sometimes the chief even took my mother and me to lunch or for a walk. No one seemed to know what to do with us, but I strongly believe the police chief's getting to know us worked in our favor.

One day a man dressed in a black suit came to our room. He took us to the police station to meet my father and board a bus to Belgrade, Yugoslavia's capital. My mother and I thought it was a set-up to make us to do something stupid and get sent back to East Germany. With great reluctance, we went with the man in black.

We met my father at the station, and the chief took us on the bus to Belgrade. Aboard the tacky, overheated bus, we sat in uncomfortable seats for a miserable twelve-hour ride with dozens of stops. My mother noticed the gun in the chief's pants, but she never mentioned it because she knew I'd be terrified.

We finally reached Belgrade. The chief took us to a hotel for refugees. Expenses were paid by the country-granting asylum, West Germany. We said good-bye to the chief, who was partly responsible for guiding us to freedom. I will never forget him.

We were unsure of what to do next. The attendant told us someone from the United Nations would contact us. About an hour later, a young, blonde, handsome man came to our door. The UN, he said, was handling our case now. He gave us directions to the West German Embassy and money for food. That night my parents were so excited, they could hardly sleep.

When we reached the embassies our hearts raced when we spotted an East German guard. We walked boldly past him to the West German embassy next door. Of course, the guard couldn't know we'd recently escaped his country. We felt like we had escapee written all over us. We triple-checked our surroundings to be certain we were at the West German embassy. Its flag left little doubt; still, my mother asked the guard if we were in the right place. When we assured her we were, my parents began to cry. We were free!

Inside, one of the embassy staff worked to get us passports. I will never forget her name: Mrs. Pempelforth. She told us we would be taking the train to Giessen to register at an office of the West Germany government.

We had not time to buy food before boarding the train for a twenty-four hour ride. Well into our journey, we reached the Yugoslavian/Austrian border. While we rode, my uncle drove from Romania back to West Germany. With no sign of us, he'd given us up for dead and burnt our fake passports. He later said it felt like he was destroying us as he set fire to them. For two more weeks, he kept watch for us anyway before returning home.

Meanwhile, we continued our journey to Giessen. Upon arrival, we discovered we were free to go as long as we returned on Monday. My mother phoned my aunt and told her. My aunt said, "Okay, we'll come visit you tomorrow." Still in a daze, she hadn't comprehended what my mother said. However, Uncle Dietmar did. "I'm going up there right now to get them!" he practically leapt into his car with my aunt's husband. We waited for him in the train station parking lot. Suddenly, we spotted his car tearing

around the corner. Jumping from it, he ran to us and hugged and kissed us. "Silke," he said, choked up, "I can't believe you made it."

A huge audience had gathered at our parking lot reunion. I glanced down at my uncle's feet and burst out laughing. He wore only socks. He was so excited he'd forgotten to put his shoes on!

This is my story. I've shared it for the sake of my children in the hope that they'll never take freedom for granted, because where I grew up, it could be taken away in an instant. Today, when I reflect that my children and I live in the freest country in the world, I'm filled with gratitude for my parents who had the courage and unwavering strength to risk their lives and mine for this opportunity.

#### About the Author

Silke Nied lives in Gig Harbor, Washington. She has two sons, 26 and 18, and a six-year-old grandson. She lived in East Germany until she was 14 and then in West Germany until she turned 27. She and her five-year old son came to Washington in 1992 after she married a military man. She had planned to stay for two years, yet has remained in the U.S., for 22 years. Her parents still live in Germany and so does Uncle Dietmar. "Never in my dreams would I have imagined living here. It's an awesome feeling to know that you can do anything you put your mind to and are never too old to do it." -Silke

If there was a way to read a woman's mind, I am not sure I would want to.

I hate shoes, shopping, gossip, and I already know I am annoying.

I once won an argument with a woman in this dream I had!

## U.S. Navy's New Laser Weapon in Action

The U.S. Navy has achieved a historic milestone with a cutting-edge new laser weapon system that can destroy targets for less than \$1 per shot. The Navy made the announcement Tuesday that for the first time ever the new laser weapon system, known as LaWS, was successfully deployed and operated aboard a Navy ship in the Arabian Gulf.

The weapon, which uses a form of concentrated directed-energy to destroy a target, has been under development by the Office of Naval Research for several years. "Laser weapons are powerful, affordable and will play a vital role in the future of naval combat operations," said Rear Adm. Matthew L. Klunder, chief of naval research. "We ran this particular weapon, a prototype, through some extremely tough paces, and it locked on and destroyed the targets we designated with near-instantaneous lethality." The demonstrations of the new weapon took place from September to November aboard the *USS Ponce* while deployed in the Arabian Gulf.

The at sea tests are being described as "historic" because not only did they show a laser weapon working aboard a deployed U.S. Navy ship, but also because the LaWS actually worked

seamlessly with existing weapon systems. During the tests, LaWS hit targets mounted aboard a speeding oncoming small boat, shot a Scan Eagle unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) out of the sky, and destroyed other moving targets at sea.

The LaWS weapon is also being praised for its cost-effectiveness, as well as the inherent increase in safety for ships and crews because lasers are not dependent on the traditional propellant and gunpowder-based ordnance found on ships. They also cost less to build, install and fire than traditional kinetic weapons - for example a multimillion-dollar missile. "At less than a dollar per shot, there's no question about the value LaWS provides," said Klunder. "With affordability a serious concern for our defence budgets, this will more effectively manage resources to ensure our Sailors and Marines are never in a fair fight."

In the future, factors from the successful deployment and demonstration aboard the *USS Ponce* will help guide the development of weapons under ONR's Solid-State Laser-Technology Maturation program. According to



the U.S. Navy, combat-ready laser prototypes that could be installed on vessels such as guided-missile destroyers and the Littoral Combat Ship in the early 2020's



NASA's robot Curiosity landed on Mars. Early pictures show no signs of ESPN, beer, or porn. This makes it very clear that men are not from Mars!

Aboriginal Tracker Somewhere between Karratha and Onslow; an Australian tour guide was showing a group of American tourists the North West. On their way to the Kimberley, he was describing the abilities of the Australian Aborigine to track man or beast over land, through the air, under the sea.

The Americans were incredulous.

Later in the day, the tour rounded a bend on the highway and discovered, lying in the middle of the road, an Aborigine. He had one ear pressed to the white line whilst his left leg was held high in the air. The tour stopped and the guide and the tourists gathered around the prostrate Aborigine.

"Jacky," said the tour guide, "what are you tracking and what are you listening for?" The aborigine replied,

"Down the road about 25 miles is a 1971 Reliant Ute. It is a red one. The left front tyre is bald. The front end is out of whack, and him got bloody dents in every panel. There are 9 black fellas in the back, all drinking warm sherry. There are 3 kangaroos on the roof rack and 6 dogs on the front seat."

The American tourists moved forward, astounded by this precise and detailed knowledge.

"God man, how do you know all that?" asked one.

The Aborigine replied..... I fell out of the pucken thing about half an hour ago!

## Out and about

By Norrie Millen



**No new bookings** have come in since last issue; so shipmate's it is time to get your booking forms in so I can get a good idea of numbers. Don't forget I have pencilled in a bus trip to Cheddar Gorge and this is also proving popular, so once you have sent your form off to hotel, do let me know and whether you want to come on bus trip or not.

**Sidmouth 2016**, something to put in your diaries too. There is a tramway at Seaton not too far away which runs on old railway track and quite an interesting ride which maybe we could pencil in?

I have an idea that if we run a bus to Seaton, do the tram ride and have bus pick us up at end of ride and take us to a pub for some lunch and maybe a wet or three would work. What do you think? All ideas and suggestions on the back of a postage stamp!

So shipmates once again an appeal to sharpen up your trusty quills and let me know how you feel and I let me have your amusing anecdotes to share with other shipmates.

*"That's all for now folks"*