



The Rum Tub or Norrie's Nocturnal and Nautical Natter

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Life is an opportunity,
benefit from it.
Life is beauty, admire it.
Life is a dream, realize it.
Life is a challenge, meet it.
Life is a duty, complete it.
Life is a game, play it.
Life is a promise, fulfil it.
Life is sorrow, overcome it.
Life is a song, sing it.
Life is a struggle, accept it.
Life is a tragedy, confront it.
Life is an adventure, dare it.
Life is luck, make it.
Life is life, fight for it."
Mother Teresa

HMS Ulster

Rum Tub

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Editorial

By Shipmate Norrie Millen



Hi! Shipmates,

Once again, spare time seems to evade me and I am sure you will not be too unhappy if I use a lot of material from my current RNA Torbay newsletter

When I was just four years old, in 1945 local matelots and ex matelots decided to form a Branch of the RNOCA in Torquay, the forerunner of the present day RNA Torbay. I at that time had never met my father as the Japanese in Singapore had captured him; my mother narrowly escaping, heavily impregnated with child (me). She managed to 'hang on to me' until we reached Mount Abu in Rajpatana, where I was duly 'hatched' at the BMH Hill Sanatorium.

Repatriated back to UK at the ripe age of six months, I did 10,000 miles at seas on the troopship RMS Britannic. I was baptised in India, again at sea on the Britannic and once again, in Capetown, my mother making absolutely sure that if we were torpedoed, I would be well blessed. Crossing the line at that early age I guess the sea was already in my blood!



Sharing cramped messdecks, socialising together, talking the unique 'navy talk' and runs ashore on mass; it was only natural that the matelots of yesteryear would want to continue this camaraderie in civil life; hence organisations like the Royal Naval Old Comrades Association becoming a place this social activity and friendship could continue on.



You may well remember many of the times when someone in the mess told a silly/dirty/humorous joke and that jogged the memories of many of us to recall other jokes, until sometimes we laughed that much it hurt. They were good times, happy times, sometimes-sad times but the memories will always stay with us. Sadly, today's modern matelot will never experience these times in the same way. That is Britain's new Navy for you!

The way I see it anyway!

The Torbay RNA was initially formed as the Royal Naval Old Comrades Association (RNOCA), on the 26th September 1945. However a much more very significant event happened on that same day, General Douglas MacArthur Head of the Allied occupation of Japan met with Emperor Hirohito, and this was the first meeting of the two since the official surrender of Japan in August.

Only two days earlier on the 24th, Emperor Hirohito says he was opposed to war and blames General Tojo for the raid on Pearl Harbour. History records that when US troops arrived at General Tojo's house to arrest him, he locked himself in and attempted to shoot himself in the heart, he missed and the bullet entered his stomach.

He was taken to a US hospital where his injuries were treated; following which he was fitted with new dentures. It is recorded the phrase "Remember Pearl Harbour" had been secretly drilled into his teeth in Morse code.

That very same day, an Allied landing party headed into mainland China to facilitate surrender terms and the disarming of Japanese troops. It was unclear if there would be resistance so the US staged a full on invasion force to make sure things went smoothly which they did.

Also on the same day Lt. Colonel Peter Dewey a US Army officer with the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) was head of a seven-man team sent to Vietnam to search for missing US pilots and to gather information on the situation of the country after the Japanese surrender. He had already arranged the repatriation of over a thousand allied soldiers including 245 Americans when on the 26th he was mistakenly identified as a French soldier. Fatally wounded in an attack by local Vietnamese soldiers, who were rebelling against the return to French rule. Thereby becoming the very first US serviceman to be killed in Indo China, which later, during further wars, including the infamous Vietnam War claimed nearly 59,000 US deaths.

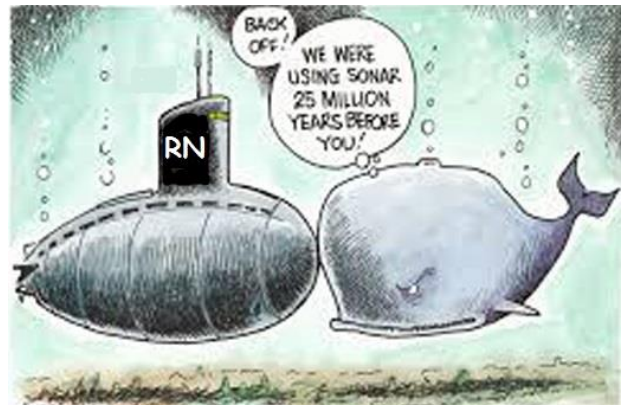
A nephew of Dewey was subsequently killed during the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Centre.

A Submariner on the helm during a surface passage through the Bay of Biscay in very heavy seas was being taken to task for the whole duration of his watch by a very irate officer of the watch on the bridge.

Nearing the end of the watch the officer screamed down the voice pipe "WHAT BLOODY IDIOT IS AT THE END OF THE VOICE PIPE?"

The rating in a very calm and collective voice replied

"WHICH END SIR!"



COURTS CONSIDER NAVY v WHALE SAFETY



"Why aren't You in the Army?"

WWI Postcard

What happened in 1945 and beyond?

By Shipmate Norrie Millen and information from internet

So what happened in 1945 apart from the end of the war? Hundreds of thousands of HO servicemen were discharged.

Many shipmates have come and gone since, some through losing interest in their various associations; Ulster a typical example. 80 shipmates on my Ulster database, (50 1958-60) but I rarely hear from more than a handful of them. Some resigning for a variety of reasons, but mostly our numbers have been reduced by those ñCrossing the barò. We try to remember all those who have passed before us in our prayers and especially on Remembrance Day. In other parts of the United Kingdom and especially in Canada all those shipmates that were lost during and after the war are remembered at ñThe Battle of Atlanticò commemoration, which is celebrated on the first Sunday in May, sadly, few seemed to have heard of the Battle of Atlantic in southern climes.

On Remembrance Day and indeed The Battle of Atlantic shipmates are remembered and we would say a nautical version of "In Flanders Fields", which I am sure you all know is a war poem in the form of a rondeau, written during the First World War by Canadian physician Major John McCrae. He was inspired to write it on May 3, 1915, after presiding over the funeral of friend and fellow soldier Alexis Helmer, who died in the Second Battle of Ypres. According to legend, fellow soldiers retrieved the poem after McCrae, initially dissatisfied with his

work, discarded it. "In Flanders Fields" was first published on December 8 of that year in the London-based magazine *Punch*.

However back to my nautical version of that famous poem, which is entitled ñOn all the Oceansò

There are a few different versions, to last few lines, however no one seems to know who first penned any of the words.

On all the oceans white caps flow,
They have no crosses row on row,
For those who sleep beneath the sea,
They sleep in peace; our country's free.
No stone ever marks a sailor's grave
When he's taken by the sea,
No name ever written on the wave
No flower from you or me.
He comes to lie, not in the soil,
But the sea that he adored,
And feared, and fought and toiled so hard,
For those upon the shore.
And the wind and tide and seabirds cry
As hard as you and me,
For those we love who come to lie
At rest, beneath the sea.
WE WILL REMEMBER THEM



How about the Royal Navy in 1945? Vastly different from today's ñeanò fleet for sure. However, let's dwell a pause of two marching paces and have a quick look back to 1939.

In 1939, the heart of the Royal Navy with its centuries old traditions and 200,000 officers and men including the Royal Marines and Reserves. At the very top as professional head was the First Sea Lord, Admiral of the Fleet Sir Dudley Pound.

Royal Navy Warship Strength

- 15 ..**Battleships & battlecruisers**, of which only two were post-World War 1. Five 'King George V' class battleships were building.
- 7**Aircraft carriers**. One was new and five of the planned six fleet carriers were under construction. There were no escort carriers.
- 66 ..**Cruisers**, mainly post-World War 1 with some older ships converted for AA duties. Including cruiser-minelayers, 23 new ones had been laid down.
- 184 **Destroyers** of all types. Over half were modern, with 15 of the old 'V' and 'W' classes modified as escorts. Under construction or on order were 32 fleet destroyers and 20 escort types of the 'Hunt' class.
- 60 ..**Submarines**, mainly modern with nine building.
- 45 ..**Escort and patrol** vessels with nine building, and the first 56 'Flower' class corvettes on order to add to the converted 'V' and 'W's' and 'Hunts'. However, there were few fast, long-endurance convoy escorts.

A vast and powerful navy for sure, but moving on to 1945 a vastly different picture.

As the war progressed, the Royal and Dominion Navies expanded rapidly with large construction programmes, particularly escort carriers, destroyers, corvettes, frigates, submarines, landing ships and craft.

By mid-1944, 800,000 officers and men and 73,000 WRNS were in uniform.

Vastly improved radars and anti-submarine weapons had been introduced, and the tactics to use them effectively, honed to a fine pitch.

Ship-borne and land-based aircraft became vital in the life and death struggle against the U-boat, the only concern Prime Minister Winston Churchill retained throughout six years of war.

Huge combined operations landings took place with air superiority usually assured.

Although not defeated, magnetic, then acoustic and finally pressure mines were kept under control.

Perhaps of greatest single significance, the 'Ultra' operation against the German Enigma codes allowed the Allies to penetrate to the very heart of German and Axis planning and operations.

The Royal Navy, still the largest in the world in

However, there was a price to be paid:

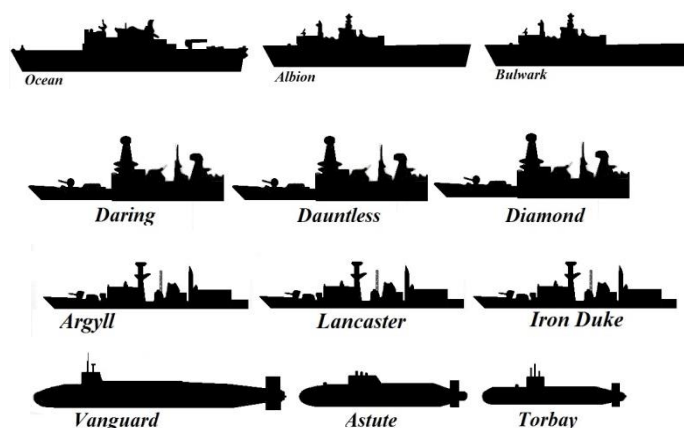
British Naval Casualties, not including RAF and Army personnel killed in related circumstances, Coastal Command, Defensively-Equipped Merchant Ships (DEMS) etc.

September 1939, included:

	Killed	Missing	Wounded
Royal Navy	50,758	820	14,663
WRNS	102		22
Merchant Navy	30,248	lost to enemy action	

ROYAL NAVY Warship types	Strength 1939	Comm. to Aug 1945	TOTAL IN SERVICE	TOTAL LOSSES
Capital ships	15	5	20	5
Carriers	7	58	65	10
Cruisers	66	35	101	34
Destroyers	184	277	461	153
Submarines	60	178	238	76
TOTALS	332	553	885	278

Moving onto today's fleet



Class	Ship	Pen.	Comm.	Displmt	Type	Base
Ocean	Ocean	L12	1998	21,500	LPD	D
Albion	Albion	L14	2003	19,560	ATD	D
Bulwark	Bulwark	L15	2004	19,560	ATD	D

Class	Ship	Pen.	Commissioned	Displacement	Type	Base
Daring or Type 45	<i>Daring</i>	D32	2009	8,500 tonnes	GMD	P
	<i>Dauntless</i>	D33	2010	8,500 tonnes	GMD	P
	<i>Diamond</i>	D34	2011	8,500 tonnes	GMD	P
	<i>Dragon</i>	D35	2012	8,500 tonnes	GMD	P
	<i>Defender</i>	D36	2013	8,500 tonnes	GMD	P
	<i>Duncan</i>	D37	2013	8,500 tonnes	GMD	P
Type 23 or Duke-class	<i>Argyll</i>	F231	1991	4,900 tonnes	Frigate	D
	<i>Lancaster</i>	F229	1992	4,900 tonnes	Frigate	P
	<i>Iron Duke</i>	F234	1993	4,900 tonnes	Frigate	P
	<i>Monmouth</i>	F235	1993	4,900 tonnes	Frigate	D
	<i>Montrose</i>	F236	1994	4,900 tonnes	Frigate	D
	<i>Westminster</i>	F237	1994	4,900 tonnes	Frigate	P
	<i>Northumberland</i>	F238	1994	4,900 tonnes	Frigate	D
	<i>Richmond</i>	F239	1995	4,900 tonnes	Frigate	P
	<i>Somerset</i>	F82	1996	4,900 tonnes	Frigate	D
	<i>Sutherland</i>	F81	1997	4,900 tonnes	Frigate	D
	<i>Kent</i>	F78	2000	4,900 tonnes	Frigate	P
	<i>Portland</i>	F79	2001	4,900 tonnes	Frigate	D
	<i>St Albans</i>	F83	2002	4,900 tonnes	Frigate	P

The Type 23 frigates will be replaced by the Global Combat Ship starting 2022

Survey

Class	Ship	Pen.	Comm.	Displacement	Type	Base
<i>Scott</i>	<i>Scott</i>	H131	1997	13,500 tonnes	Ocean survey	D
<i>Echo-class</i>	<i>Echo</i>	H87	2003	3,740 tonnes	Multi-purpose survey	D
	<i>Enterprise</i>	H88	2003	3,740 tonnes	Multi-purpose survey	D
<i>Gleaner</i>	<i>Gleaner</i>	H86	1983	22 tonnes	Coastal survey	D
<i>Protector</i>	<i>Protector</i>	A173	2011	5,000 tonnes	Icebreaker & survey	P

Class	Ship	Pen.	Comm.	Displacement	Type	Base
Hunt Class	<i>Ledbury</i>	M30	1981	750 tonnes	MH	P
	<i>Cattistock</i>	M31	1982	750 tonnes	MH	P
	<i>Brocklesby</i>	M33	1983	750 tonnes	MH	P
	<i>Middleton</i>	M34	1984	750 tonnes	MH	P
	<i>Chiddingfold</i>	M37	1984	750 tonnes	MH	P
	<i>Atherstone</i>	M38	1987	750 tonnes	MH	P
	<i>Hurworth</i>	M39	1985	750 tonnes	MH	P
Sandown Class	<i>Quorn</i>	M41	1989	750 tonnes	MH	P
	<i>Penzance</i>	M106	1998	600 tonnes	MH	CL
	<i>Pembroke</i>	M107	1998	600 tonnes	MH	CL
	<i>Grimsby</i>	M108	1999	600 tonnes	MH	CL
	<i>Bangor</i>	M109	2000	600 tonnes	MH	CL
	<i>Ramsey</i>	M110	2000	600 tonnes	MH	CL
	<i>Blyth</i>	M111	2001	600 tonnes	MH	CL
	<i>Shoreham</i>	M112	2001	600 tonnes	MH	CL

In addition to the above vessels, the now decommissioned HMS *Brecon* (Hunt-class) and HMS *Cromer* (Sandown-class) act as training ships, located at the shore establishment HMS *Raleigh* and the Britannia Royal Naval College, respectively.

Patrol

Cl	Ship	Pen.	Com..	Displacement	Type	Base
River class	<i>Mersey</i>	P283	2003	1,700 tonnes	OPV	P
	<i>Severn</i>	P282	2003	1,700 tonnes	OPV	P
	<i>Tyne</i>	P281	2003	1,700 tonnes	OPV	P
	<i>Clyde</i>	P257	2007	2,000 tonnes	OPV	P
P2000 or Archer-Class	<i>Archer</i>	P264	1985	54 tonnes	PBoat	URNU
	<i>Biter</i>	P270	1986	54 tonnes	PBoat	URNU
	<i>Smiter</i>	P272	1988	54 tonnes	PBoat	URNU
	<i>Pursuer</i>	P273	1988	54 tonnes	PBoat	URNU
	<i>Blazer</i>	P279	1988	54 tonnes	PBoat	URNU
	<i>Dasher</i>	P280	1988	54 tonnes	PBoat	URNU
	<i>Puncher</i>	P291	1988	54 tonnes	PBoat	URNU
	<i>Charger</i>	P292	1988	54 tonnes	PBoat	URNU
	<i>Ranger</i>	P293	1988	54 tonnes	PBoat	URNU
	<i>Trumpeter</i>	P294	1988	54 tonnes	PBoat	URNU
	<i>Express</i>	P163	1988	54 tonnes	PBoat	URNU
	<i>Example</i>	P165	1985	54 tonnes	PBoat	URNU
	<i>Explorer</i>	P164	1986	54 tonnes	PBoat	URNU
	<i>Exploit</i>	P167	1988	54 tonnes	PBoat	URNU
	<i>Tracker</i>	P274	1998	54 tonnes	PBoat	CL
	<i>Raider</i>	P275	1998	54 tonnes	PBoat	CL
Scimitar class	<i>Scimitar</i>	P284	2003	24 tonnes	PBoat	Gib.
	<i>Sabre</i>	P285	2003	24 tonnes	PBoat	Gib.
	<i>Sabre</i>	P285	2003	24 tonnes	PBoat	Gi

Classic ships

Class	Ship	Pen.No.	Comm.	Displacement	Type	Base
<i>Type 82</i>	<i>Bristol</i>	D23	1973	7,100 tonnes	GMD	P
<i>Victory</i>	<i>Victory</i>		1778	3,556 tonnes	1 st rate	P

Ships under construction

The following vessels (in red table) are at various stages of construction in or have been confirmed with shipyards around the UK, and will join the Royal Navy in the near future.

Further off, there is the Successor submarine which will replace the UK's *Vanguard-class*, nuclear deterrent submarines, with the first due in service by 2028.

Preparatory and design work has begun on the Type 26 frigate, which will replace the UK's Type 23 frigates, with the first ship due in service by 2022.

A preliminary look into replacing the mine countermeasures vessels with a single versatile class including both mine countermeasures and hydrography/survey roles is also being undertaken

Class	Ship	Pen No.	Displacement	Comm.
<i>Queen Elizabeth Class</i>	<i>Queen Elizabeth</i>	R08	65,000 tonnes	2017
	<i>Prince of Wales</i>	R09	65,000 tonnes	2019
<i>River-class batch II</i>	<i>Forth</i>		2000 tonnes	2017
	<i>Medway</i>		2000 tonnes	2017/8
	<i>Trent</i>		2000 tonnes	2018
<i>Astute Class</i>	<i>Artful</i>	S121	7400 tonnes	2015
	<i>Audacious</i>	S122	7400 tonnes	2018
	<i>Anson</i>	S123	7400 tonnes	2020
	<i>Agamemnon</i>	S124	7400 tonnes	2023
	<i>Ajax</i>	S125	7400 tonnes	2024

The Tamar Bridge

I once looked out from the Tamar Bridge at the Warships down below,
Ships of the modern Navy with names I do not know.

And as I stood and gazed at them on the water far below,

I saw a fleet of phantom ships and men of long ago.

The Rodney and the Nelson, 'the Valiant, Ramillies, Repulse, Renown and Malaya', coming home from foreign seas.

I saw Revenge and Warspite, ill-fated Royal Oak,
So many ships, their names made faint by shell and fire and smoke"

~~~~~

And some I see to harbour. Come as though thro' glasses dark,

The Barham and the Glorious, the Eagle and the Ark,

And then there comes the greatest, the mighty warship Hood,

Dark and grey and wraithlike from the spot on which I stood.

From the cruel North Atlantic, from the Med and Java Sea,

The big ships and the little ships returned for me to see;

There's the Glow-worm and the Harding, the Devonshire and Kent,

The Cossack and Courageous, the Suffolk and Ardent.

~~~~~

But mercifully hidden are the men and stilled their cries,

Now I can't see very clearly-must be smoke that's in my eyes;

You don't know Shorty Hasset, he won the DSM,
He still fought on when Exeter was burning stern
to stem.

Where now, Dodger Long and Lofty, where now
the Boys and Men?

They are, lost and gone forever- will we see the
like again?

I thought I saw them mustering on deck for daily
prayer and heard "For those in Peril" rise on the
evening air.

~~~~~

Then darker grew the picture as the lowering  
night came on,

I looked down from the lefty bridge but all those  
ships had gone,

Those mighty ships had vanished; gone those  
simple men,

We'll surely never ever see the like of them again.

~~~~~



YOUNG AT HEART
Slightly older
in other places.

ODOURS

A while ago a new supermarket opened in
Topeka, KS.

It has an automatic water mister to keep the
salad fresh. Just before it goes on, you hear
the sound of distant thunder and the smell of
fresh rain.

When you pass the milk cases, you hear cows
mooing and you experience the scent of
freshly mown hay.

In the meat department there is the aroma of
charcoal grilled steaks with onions.

When you approach the egg case, you hear
hens cluck and cackle, and the air is filled with
the pleasing aroma of bacon and eggs frying.

The bread department features the tantalizing
smell of fresh baked bread and cookies.

(I don't buy toilet paper there anymore.)

A minister was completing a temperance sermon.
With great emphasis he said,

'If I had all the beer in the world, I'd take it and
pour it into the river.'

With even greater emphasis, he said, 'And if I had
All the wine in the world, I'd take it and pour it
into the river.'

And then finally, shaking his fist in the air, he
said, 'And if I had all the whiskey in the world,
I'd take it and pour it into the river.'

Sermon complete, he sat down...

The song leader stood very cautiously and
announced with a smile, nearly laughing, 'For our
closing song, Let us sing Hymn #365, 'Shall We
Gather at the River.'

**The only trouble
with retirement...**
you never get a damn day off!

www.cafepress.com/GeezerShop



I DON'T THINK ABOUT DYING.
It's the last thing I want to do.

USS Recruit

TDE-1 USS *Recruit* was a landlocked dummy US Navy training ship. Built to scale, she was roughly $\frac{2}{3}$ the size of a WWII era Dealey Class Destroyer Escort she was based upon (thus the "TDE" - Training Destroyer Escort) and when completed, she was 225 long with a 24 foot 4 inch beam, and sported a 41-foot mast.

USS *Recruit* was commissioned on 27 July 1949.

USS *Recruit* was purpose-built as a training facility and considered a commissioned vessel - and traditional Navy shipboard procedures were observed just like all other Navy vessels. She was also known (affectionately and otherwise) as USS *Neversail**.

During her construction, NTC's seamanship division sailors supervised the rigging with standard Navy fittings obtained from salvaged and mothballed ships. USS *Recruit* was built of a wooden frame covered with sheet metal, with four "decks" used for training.

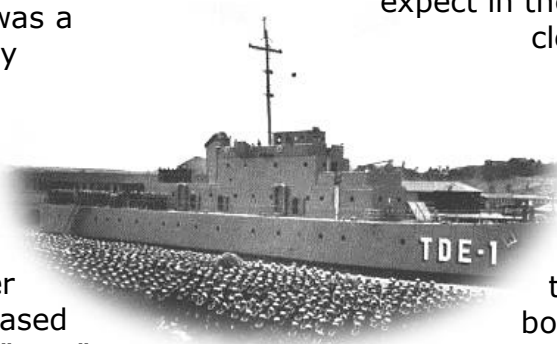
USS *Recruit* served as a school for all recruits going through basic seamanship indoctrination. The ship's deck was an exact replica of what a Sailor could

expect in the fleet. The *Recruit* had cleats, chocks and mooring lines and operated as any standard Navy ship - this was for most recruits their first "request permission to come aboard". On board, sailors learned marlin spike seamanship, ground tackle operation, cargo booms, deck fittings, lift boat handling and signal equipment.

Recruits were put through traditional shipboard drills and they learned to use all the standard ship deck and bridge gear like that found on all naval vessels, including lifelines, accommodation ladders, signal halyards, searchlights, the engine order telegraph and the helm (the exception being for engine-related practices, as there was no engine, boilers or screws). In addition to the regular classrooms, a company of recruits would stay on board from 8 p.m. to 8 a.m. each night to stand watch as if aboard an operational ship.

Training recruits is hard work, and USS *Recruit* started showing her "miles", so in 1954, USS *Recruit* went into a 3-month "dry-dock" for an overhaul and minor repairs.

Time goes by, and technology progresses. Which can cause some issues - after many years of service,



USS *Recruit* ran up against computer technology. In 1967, Navy civilian employees were making a card-index inventory of vessels in the San Diego area and found themselves baffled and bewildered by one particular card, which, when placed through the computer for classification, was continually rejected.

The computer's program had a problem in that the ship was neither afloat nor tied up ashore. It was not in dry dock, nor undergoing repairs or overhauling. It was not in "mothball" and it had no crew! Add to that the fact that the ship had no boilers, engines or screws and these hard-working folks discovered that the programming could not classify USS *Recruit* as a commissioned vessel. Rather than get the computer program modified, USS *Recruit* was decommissioned on 7 March 1967. However, the facility was still used for training of recruits.

Fast-forward a decade or so – in the early 1980's, it was decided that USS *Recruit* again needed renovation and upgrading, in order to reflect a more current look. Therefore, in 1982, she underwent a "yard period", upgrading her to closely resemble the Oliver Hazard Perry class Guided Missile Fast Frigate –

then becoming TFFG-1. At this time, USS *Recruit* was re-commissioned (though I have no notes on how the computer issue was resolved).

More time passed, and Naval Training Center San Diego and Recruit Training Center, San Diego was closed in 1997 by the Base Closure and Realignment Commission (BRAC). Consequently, USS *Recruit* was also decommissioned.



Recruit is included in the Naval Training Centre's listing on the National Register of Historic Places and has gained both National Historic and State Historic designation. The former Naval

Training Center is now Liberty Station, and the *Recruit* sits adjacent to the retail area.

WW1 version

Recruit still stands (though currently unused), with hopes that she will someday become a maritime museum. Recently (2014), Corky McMillin Cos. – which

developed Liberty Station after the base closed in 1997 – joined forces with the USS Midway Museum and active duty and retired Navy personnel to get the *Recruit* shipshape again.

Recruit seems to be the only surviving example of the Navy's various landlocked ships – at one time, the Navy also operated two other similar training "vessels":



USS *Commodore*(401B) [also known as R.T.S. *Commodore*] at Naval Training Center Bainbridge, Maryland, which was dismantled in the 1970's when the base was closed.*(The nickname, "USS *Neversail*, was used to refer to USS *Commodore* as well)

USS *Blue Jacket* at Naval Training Center Orlando, Florida, which was removed in 1990's.

Note of interest TDE-1 / TFFG-1 was actually the third commissioned vessel

the Navy had with the name *Recruit* – the second one was an actual sailing vessel – AM-285 USS *Recruit*, an Admiral-class minesweeper built during World War II. Commissioned 8 November 1944, she saw action in the Pacific and was awarded three battle stars. She was decommissioned and placed in reserve in 1946, which allowed the name "*Recruit*" to be used for another commissioned Navy vessel. AM-285 was sold to the Mexican Navy in 1963.

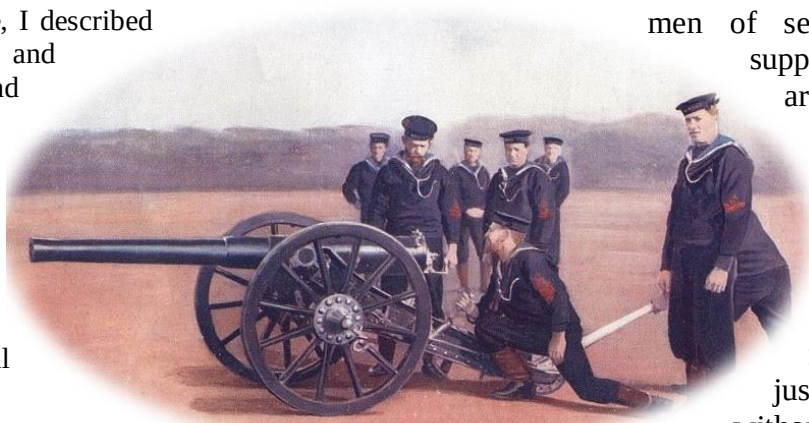
The Real Field Gun Story Part II

Submitted by Ken Jones –HMS Tenby Association – HMS Ulster 1961-63

In the last episode, I described the background and build-up to the 2nd Boer war, and the Navy's arrival at the Cape and the preparations leading up to the landing of the first Naval Brigade.

In this issue, Jack goes into action, not to relieve Ladysmith initially, that would not happen for a further 4 months, but to end up actually providing the counter siege artillery inside the town.

The war started on the 11th of October 1899, when the Transvaal government telegraphed to all Boer positions the single Dutch word for war - Oorlog. At this the waiting Boers rode out in three columns across the border into Natal province from the Orange Free State through passes in the mountain range at Botha's pass, Mol's Neck and Wool's Drift in what was probably the largest body of armed mounted men that Africa had ever seen. This force consisted of 12,000



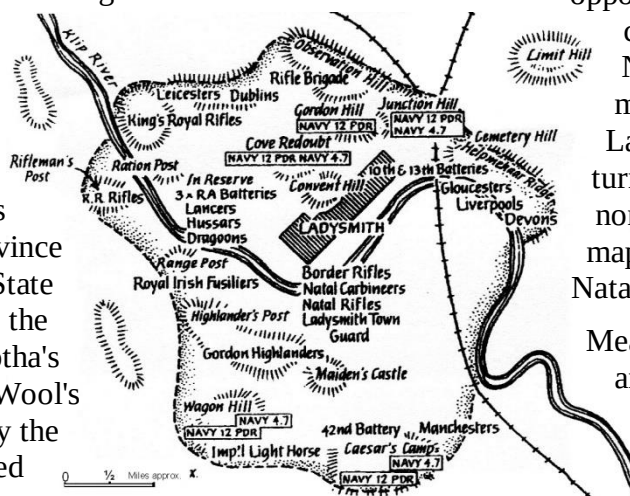
men of seven 'commando's, supported by a regular artillery formation consisting of 96 Krupp guns and 2 Creusot 6" (long toms). Amazingly, they advanced 70 miles into Natal in just a few days without meeting any

resistance. It seemed that the

British army had been caught completely by surprise and they advanced through a landscape deserted by the scattered settlers who had got wind of their advance. Three days later they entered the town of Newcastle, their only

opposition being the constant, driving rain. Newcastle is only 60 miles north of Ladysmith, which is in turn about 189 miles northwest of Durban (see map above), the capital of Natal province.

Meanwhile, *Powerful* arrived at Durban on the 28th of October and by 1700 on the next day the embarked had disembarked and



naval brigade

boarded two trains which were awaiting them, taking their guns and as much stores, ammunition and tentage that could be crammed on. The train journey to Ladysmith took an uncomfortable 24 hours.

Whilst the navy were preparing at the Cape, the army, under General White, made contact with the advancing Boers on the 20th of October just outside Dundee and tried to halt their

progress. However, the Boer columns surrounded the force and using their manoeuvrability and the ground to advantage, cut this force to pieces. The outcome of the battle of Dundee was that the British had 161 killed or wounded including their CO, 331 surrendered and a separate column of 4,000 was forced sixty miles back to the safety of Ladysmith. There was even worse to come! On the 29th of October, as the Boers drew nearer to the town General White sent another force out to engage them. As the force advanced in darkness up a steep hill some of the supply train pack mules slipped and fell and the rest bolted, this caused the loss of their artillery and ammunition and when day broke the force found themselves in the open in a valley surrounded by Boer.

The gunners' daily task was to spot the position of, and silence any Boer gun that opened up on the town and, always remembering to conserve their ammunition as no one could be sure how long the siege would last. They became quite adept at this as time went on. As the Boers used smokeless ammo, it was usually a puff of dust from recoil in dry weather, or differences in the colour of cut greenery disguising the gun as it dried out. Alternatively, even just a shimmer in the air from the heat of a discharge.



One army colonel was present at a battery on one such occasion and when he asked how a gun, which had just opened fire, was located, the young midshipman who was doing the spotting replied. 'See that line of trees on the crest of that hill, well there were six yesterday and now there is only five and a gun on the lee side of the hill is using it as his gun target line'. The seamen manned the guns whilst the stokers brought the ammo from a remote protected dump some distance away.

Of course, this applied to the enemy as well and for a while, it seemed that the Boers also possessed the art of spotting the brigades batteries. On the 22nd of December, the Reverend in charge of the Hanoverian mission in Ladysmith was caught crossing the lines and under questioning he confessed to giving away the batteries whereabouts to the Boers.

Having a Fleet Paymaster in the brigade may seem strange but he was a veteran of many land campaigns in the Nile, Burma and Abyssinia and had become used to making the best of things. He managed to obtain books packs of cards and even a football for the lads but his greatest feat was to purchase the towns remaining beer stocks for £30.

On Christmas eve the Boer guns fell silent as they attended church services but, on Christmas morning 2 shells landed within the perimeter but did not explode, they had 'compliments of the season' written on them and were filled with Xmas pudding!

As February neared, food became more of a problem. At the start, it was estimated that there were supplies for 50 days, and they were now nearing the 100-day mark. The relief column, with another naval brigade in support was near but making agonisingly slow progress.

To be continued next issue.

