



The Rum Tub or Norrie's Nocturnal and Nautical Natter

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Because of Covid for the first time since 1945 the National Spelling Bee is cancel...cancel...cansel... Its been called off.

"OLD" IS WHEN Your sweetie says, "Let's go upstairs and make love," and you answer, "Honey, I can't do both!"

"OLD" IS WHEN Your friends compliment you on your new alligator shoes and you're barefoot

"OLD " IS WHEN A sexy babe catches your fancy and your pacemaker opens the garage door.

OLD " IS WHEN Going bra-less pulls all the wrinkles out of your face.

"OLD " IS WHEN You don't care where your spouse goes, just as long as you don't have to go along.

"OLD " IS WHEN You are cautioned to slow down by the doctor instead of by the police.

"OLD" IS WHEN "Getting a little action" means I don't need to take any fibre today.

"OLD "IS WHEN "Getting lucky" means you find your car in the parking lot

"OLD" IS WHEN An "all nighter" *means not getting up to go to the bathroom.

HMS Ulster Rum Tub

Volume 10,

Issue 1

February 2021

Editorial

By Shipmate Norrie Millen

Hi! Shipmates,

This will be the first newsletter of the New Year, a year which I know we all hope and pray will see us emerge from this terrible pandemic and into a better place. As I sat down to write this, I received another of those dreaded calls with bad news. As soon as a friend of a shipmate's wife calls, I know what the devastating news is going to be. A guy who I joined the Royal Navy with in 1957 at St Vincent and who I still maintained contact with, succumbed to Covid this morning.

Tim (named changed for personal reasons) had completed nine years in the RN, when he decided to transfer to the Royal Marine Commandos. After nine years as a Royal Marine Commando, he decided to transfer back to the RN. I tried to establish why, but he was always tight lipped over this.

Tim had not been too well the last few years. In the last six months he suffered 10 strokes, which left him almost speechless, unable to walk anymore and confining him to a wheelchair. A devastating blow to a super keep fit fanatic. Obviously with these serious health issues he was most vulnerable and tested positive three weeks ago when he was admitted to hospital, never to recover.

Sadly he had not left any finances or plans for his final journey and only instructions he left for his widow was no funeral, no flowers, and no cards. He just wants to be taken to local cemetery and buried without any fuss or ceremony. I was able to point his widow in the right direction to try and secure some money for a plot, burial expenses and the undertaker's fee. The lesson here: Be like a boy scout, be prepared.

2020 was a terrible year for us all in one way and another. Let's all hope and pray that 2021 will see a massive improvement for us all and on the right side of Covid-19 and leading normal lives again.

By the time your get around to reading this I will have reached another milestone, my 79th birthday. I often reflect on past years and wonder where they all went, years which seem to pass more quickly as one grows older

The way I see it anyway!



Captain Duncan Knight RN (Rtd) – Obituary

The naval officer who took part in the destruction of two U-boats.

Submitted by Shipmate Kevin Maguire

He was awarded the DSC for his actions in 1941 and 1942 off Gibraltar.

Captain Duncan Knight, who has died aged 100, sank two U-boats in similar circumstances, five weeks apart.

In the early hours of December 7 1941 he was officer of the watch in the destroyer

***Hesperus*, in the Atlantic west of Gibraltar, when the radar operator, Leading Seaman John Sheard, reported an echo dead ahead.**

Ordering the ship's searchlight to be switched on, Knight expected to see a fishing boat: instead, right ahead, fully illuminated by the searchlight, was a surfaced U-boat on the same course and a similar speed to *Hesperus*.

Knight could see men in the conning tower that had obviously been unaware of *Hesperus*'s approach, and as they disappeared below, and the U-boat dived, Knight rang for "Action Stations!"



Duncan Knight in 1941

"It was the most exciting moment of my life", Knight wrote. "For 18 months we had hunted for U-boats without success and suddenly we were almost alongside one!"

As *Hesperus* passed through the swirl of water left by the U-boat on the surface of the darkened sea, Knight released a pattern of five depth charges set to explode at shallow depth. For the rest of the night *Hesperus*, joined by her sister ship *Harvester*, searched using their radars and sonars, but dawn broke on an empty and silent sea with no sign of a U-boat or any wreckage. *Hesperus* returned,

disappointed, to Gibraltar; however, post-war analysis proved that Knight had sunk U-208.



German PoW's disembarking from the *Hesperus*

On January 15 1942, *Hesperus* was part of the escort of a homeward bound convoy from Freetown, in foggy weather and a heavy swell, not far from Gibraltar. Again, Knight and Sheard shared the middle watch, when at 02:10 Sheard suddenly

reported an echo on the starboard side about one and a half miles away.

Knight altered course and increased speed, called the captain, and ordered "Action Stations!" When starshell was fired to illuminate the radar echo, there was a U-boat at full speed on the surface.

His captain, Commander A.A. Tait, took over the conn while Knight, whose action station was as gunnery officer, had opened fire with Hesperus's 4.7 in guns when Tait decided to ram. Hesperus struck the U-boat a glancing blow, so forceful that the German captain, Kapitänleutnant Horst Elfe, was catapulted into the sea.

As the U-boat scrunched along Hesperus's side, a pattern of depth charges was released and the U-boat stopped about 200 yards off. Lieutenant David Seely and a boarding party set off in the ship's whaler, hoping to capture an Enigma machine, but the U-boat sank less than 15 minutes after Sheard's first radar detection.

Despite the known risk of other U-boats being present, Tait picked up some 40 survivors of U-93 who were landed in Gibraltar before Hesperus was sent



Horst Elfe, Kapitänleutnant of U-93



A stamp issued in Hesperus's honour

to Falmouth for repairs.

For skill and enterprise in action against enemy submarines Knight was awarded the DSC and Sheard the DSM.

Duncan Dalziel Knight was born in Kingswood, Surrey, on October 20 1920, a descendant of Captain Charles Mansfield, who had commanded the 74-gun ship-of-line Minotaur at the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805, and scion of a family who peopled the Empire over several centuries. Educated at Banstead prep, he chose Dartmouth over Harrow and joined the Navy in the Anson term of 1933.

Knight served in the cruiser Amphion on the Africa station under the future Admiral Sir Bob Burnett, victor of the Battle of North Cape, and had been at sea for a year when the ship received the signal "TOTAL GERMANY", the call that war had been declared.

He recalled his first wartime order, when during the night of September 4-5 1939; he heard the guns ordered to "Load, Load, Load, and no bloody skylark!"



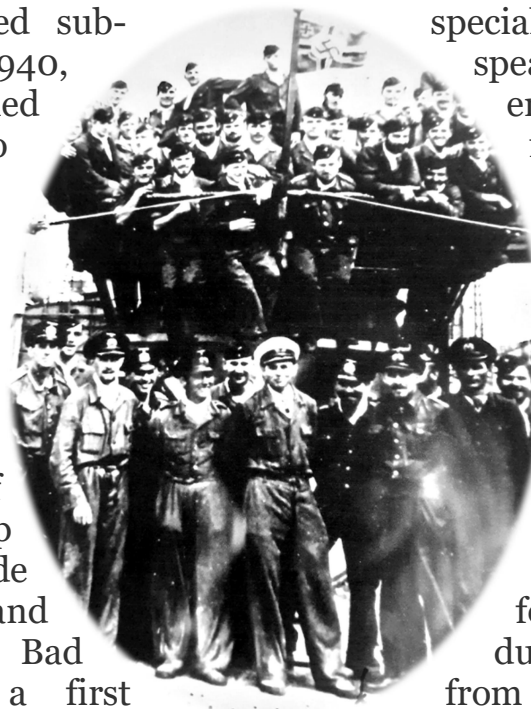
The Hesperus arrives in Falmouth after ramming U-93

As a newly promoted sub-lieutenant in June 1940, he was one of the armed boarding party who stormed the French flagship in Portsmouth after the fall of France.

Later that year, Knight and he took part in Operation Lucid, one of Churchill's madcap schemes to blockade the invasion ports and set them on fire. Bad weather prevented a first attempt: on a second try, Knight's ship, the elderly merchant ship *River Tyne*, was sunk by a mine off Dieppe and Knight was rescued by an MTB, only to find that his uniform and effects had already been sent to the "deadmen's store" because his initials were "DD" – which in naval parlance means "discharged dead".

Throughout the war the weather was the worst enemy, and Knight could never forget the experience of hauling exhausted and injured men, often covered in oil, on board: "The merchant seamen," he wrote, "were the real heroes of the Battle of the Atlantic." Knight himself was permanently seasick, a condition which was cured on return to harbour by a bowl of hot chips and tomato sauce.

In April 1943, in the destroyer *Goathland*, Knight took part in one of the first successful "Headache" operations in the Channel, when with



The crew of U-93

specially trained German-speaking operators embarked, she intercepted the radio conversations which not only gave away the enemy's position but also their intended movements.

It was Knight's first experience of being under fire, and as the night erupted in a blaze of explosions, at first he found it difficult to not to duck, but took his example from his captain, Lieutenant Commander Nigel Pumphrey DSO, DSC, who "was quite unmoved". The merchant ship and an escort were sunk, but several men in *Goathland* were wounded, including Knight, who was admitted to hospital, and Mentioned in Despatches.

Knight specialised as a signal officer, and saw the end of the war as Fleet Wireless Assistant in the British Pacific Fleet in the cruiser *Bermuda*, whose duties took her to Formosa, Yokohama, Shanghai and Hong Kong.

Post war, Knight undertook a number of highly secretive appointments, as liaison between the Admiralty and GCHQ, including responsibility for the 1,500 strong Admiralty Civilian Shore Wireless Service, which manned listening stations at home and abroad intercepting foreign wireless traffic for



Duncan Knight, Assistant Chief of Staff (Communications) and Senior British Officer at NATO headquarters in Naples



analysis by GCHQ.

Knight also commanded three ships, the destroyers Comet and Caprice and the frigate Blackpool. He interspersed these seagoing commands with first-class shore appointments including to NATO in Oslo and



Duncan Knight on his 100th birthday

Naples.

On retirement from the Navy, Knight was private secretary to the Lord Mayor of London for some 18 months before being appointed general manager to Trinity College of Music; he guided the college from an underfunded private institution to a fully funded higher education establishment.

In 2001 Knight was invited by the survivors of U-93 to their annual reunion, to discover that Horst Elfe was a German senator and recipient of an honorary CBE for his work towards Anglo-German relations.

Knight married Flavia Drake in 1947. She predeceased him in 2010, and he is survived by their son and two daughters.

Horst Elfe, Kapitänleutnant of U-93; was later a German senator who was appointed honorary CBE for his work towards Anglo-German relations

The Ship's Cat

Submitted by Shipmate Alan Port

Eds. Note. Although I ran a similar article back in 2016, this has a slightly different twist and involves not one but two cats.

As far back as ancient Egypt families storing grain over winter realised the value of the domesticated cat for keeping vermin away from their valuable crops. It was therefore no surprise that cats became regular members of the ship's crew whenever food needed protection from the rats which would scurry onboard and hide in the bilges waiting to sneak out and steal the crew's rations.

This tradition carried on into the Second World War and some cats received fame, or notoriety, for their exploits.

Perhaps the most famous Royal Navy cat was 'Able Seaman Simon'. In 1948 the frigate HMS Amethyst was



storing ship at 'Stonecutters' Island' in Hong Kong when a black and white cat called Simon was smuggled onboard by a young sailor. Fortunately the Captain took a liking to Simon and, as the ship had a vacancy for a good rat-catcher, Simon was pressed into service.

Simon quickly settled into naval life and, when not catching rats, spent his time

sleeping on the Captain's bunk, on the chart table, or even in the Captain's Hat! However, Simon's idyllic life was about to be upset by a turn of events. HMS Amethyst was ordered to sail to Nanking to take up the role of guard ship in April 1949. As history records, the Amethyst came under fire on passage up the Yangtze River. The Captain was killed and Simon wounded when a Chinese shell struck the ship. Three pieces of shrapnel were removed from Simon's back, but he survived and, according to the crew, lifted their spirits during the four months the Amethyst was held captive by the People's Liberation Army.

In July 1949, the Amethyst made a daring escape and was able to return home, together with the brave Able Seaman Simon. Tragically, however, Simon succumbed to his wounds, but not before he had been awarded the Amethyst Campaign Medal, the Blue Cross Medal for animal bravery and heroism, and the Dickin Medal - the animal version of the Victoria Cross (he remains the only cat to have received this award).

Other feline casualties of war occurred across the Navy, deemed 'missing in action' were 'Ginger' and 'Fishcakes', inhabitants of HMS Hood. They were not however the only animals lost when the Bismarck sunk the Hood. The Hood, which was called by some 'Noah's Ark', is reported to have gone down with a goat, a possum, a squirrel, a monkey, a marmoset, a beaver, a variety of birds, a wallaby and a dog!

Two notable cats

Finally, there is the tale of the luckiest (or un-luckiest) cat in the Royal Navy - Oscar, also known as 'Unsinkable Sam'.



Oscar, or Oscar also known as 'Unsinkable Sam'



It is recorded that the Bismarck had, amongst its crew, a black cat called 'Oskar' who was onboard when the Bismarck's gunners sent Ginger and Fishcakes to a watery grave. However, revenge came quickly, when a torpedo from a Swordfish aircraft from HMS Ark Royal disabled the Bismarck. The Royal Navy closed in and carried out Winston Churchill's order to 'Sink the Bismarck'.

Oskar, however, was not done for and was spotted (and painted for posterity) floating on a piece of wood in the middle of the ocean. He was picked up by HMS Cossack and re-named 'Oscar'. Unfortunately, his rescue was not to prove an entirely lucky break as the Cossack was herself sunk five months later. Oscar, however, having survived one sinking, knew the drill and again made it onto a piece of floating debris and, in a bizarre twist of fate, was picked up by HMS Ark Royal - the ship that had sent Oskar into the water only a few months earlier.

Oscar, now re-named 'Unsinkable Sam' was not finished with the war just yet. The following year it was HMS Ark Royal's turn to be sunk in enemy action (this led to some believe that Oscar, or Oskar, was revenging the memory of his first masters onboard the Bismarck). This time Seaman Tom Blundell saved Oscar's life and both of them were picked up by HMS Legion. However, Oscar's reputation as a cat that sank ships resulted in him being handed over to the Harbour Master in Gibraltar. Oscar's sea time was over. His last posting was to an Old Sailors' Home in Belfast where he saw out his days, dying in 1955 at the age of 15.

PS: Despite HMS Legion landing the 'jinxed' Oscar she did not escape the 'curse of the Bismarck', for she too was sunk in March 1942.

Eds. Note: As for Sam's legacy, it goes to show that even in the most dire of circumstances, even as everything around you is crumbling down, you can still cling on to a piece of wood, get rescued, and move on to another ship and start over again. Or it goes to show that cats really do have 9 lives — all of which are absolutely worth living.

French Cruiser submarine FS *Surcouf*

From the Internet

Compiled and edited by Norrie Millen

Part I

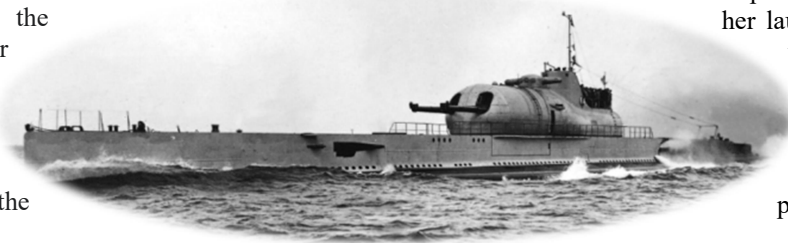
FS *Surcouf* was the largest French cruiser submarine. She served in both the French Navy and the Free French Naval Forces during the Second World War.

She was lost during the night of 18/19 February 1942 in the Caribbean Sea, possibly after colliding with an American freighter. ***Surcouf*** was named after the French privateer Robert Surcouf. She was the largest submarine built until surpassed by the first Japanese I-400-class submarine in 1943.

The French croiseur sous-marin (cruiser submarine) FS ***Surcouf*** (NN-3), served in both the French Navy and the Free French Naval Forces during the Second World War.

At 10.30pm on 18 February 1942, the FS ***Surcouf*** was lost with all hands in the Caribbean Sea. An official joint U.S. and Free French report stated that she left Bermuda on 12 February and was accidentally rammed and sunk by the American freighter ***Thompson Lykes*** off the north coast of Panama near the Panama Canal. The report states that the accident was due to both vessels running at night without lights because of the menace of German U-boats.

It is possible the collision had damaged *Surcouf*'s radio and the stricken boat limped towards Panama hoping for the best. The records of the USAAF 6th Heavy Bomber Group operating out of Panama show them sinking a large submarine northeast of Columbus on the morning of 19 February 1941. Two Northrup A-17 and one Douglas B-18 Bolo aircraft were involved, dropping eight bombs on the vessel. Since no German submarine was lost in the area on that date, it could have been *Surcouf*. A later French investigation commission stated that the *Surcouf* had been sunk by US planes in the morning of the 18th in a "friendly fire" accident in the same area.



FS *Surcouf* (NN-3) served in the French & Free French Naval Forces during Second World War.

(Marine nationale, Ministère de la Défense Photo)

The ***Surcouf*** was named after Robert Surcouf, who had been a French privateer. At the time of her launch in 1929, she was the world's largest pre-Second World War submarine, 361 feet long, and weighed 3,304 tons. She was powered by a pair of 3800-hp Sulzer diesel engines and two electric motors and had a range of 10,000 miles at 10 knots. She could reach a surface speed of 18 knots, 8.5 knots submerged.

The ***Surcouf*** was designed to be an underwater heavy cruiser, which would see and engage in surface combat. She was armed with twin 203-mm/50 Modèle 1924 (8-inch) guns mounted in a single pressure-tight turret forward of the conning tower. These guns were the same calibre as that of a surface heavy cruiser, a formidable armament for a submarine.



Approximate location of the collision of the *Thompson Sykes* and FS *Surcouf* 18 Feb 1942

She was provisioned with 600 rounds of ammunition. The two guns had a 60-round magazine capacity and were controlled by a

director with a 5-m (16 ft.) rangefinder, mounted high enough to have an 11 km (5.9 nmi/6.8 mi) view of the horizon. The ***Surcouf***'s crew was capable of putting the guns into action and firing within three minutes after surfacing. Using the boat's periscopes to direct the fire of the main guns, *Surcouf* could increase this range to 16 km (8.6 nmi/9.9 mi). An elevating platform was originally supposed to lift lookouts 15 m (49 ft.)

high, but this design was abandoned quickly because of roll. Two 37-mm Hotchkiss Anti-aircraft cannon and machine guns were mounted on the top of the hangar.

The boat encountered several technical challenges, owing to the 203-mm guns. Because of the low height of the rangefinder above the water surface, the practical range of fire was 12,000 m (13,000 yd) with the rangefinder (16,000 m (17,000 yd) with sighting aided by periscope), well below the



***Surcouf* visiting Casablanca in 1938**

normal maximum of 26,000 m (28,000 yd). The duration between the surface order and the first firing round was 3 minutes and 35 seconds. This duration could have been longer in case the boat was going to fire broadside, which meant surfacing and training the turret in the desired direction. Firing had to occur at a precise moment of pitch and roll when the ship was level. Training the turret to either side was limited to when the ship rolled 8° or more. The *Surcouf* was not equipped to fire at night, due to inability to observe the fall of shot in the dark. The mounts were designed to fire 14 rounds from each gun before their magazines were reloaded

She was built with a cylindrical watertight hangar located behind the conning tower, housing a Marcel Besson MB.411-AFN reconnaissance floatplane. This aircraft was stored in 'kit form' and it could be rolled out and launched from a ramp. The floatplane was primarily used for gun calibration and was capable of a speed of 100 knots with a range of 400 kilometres. The Besson observation plane could be used to direct fire out to the guns' 26 mi (23 nmi; 42 km) maximum range.

The *Surcouf's* underwater armament included ten torpedo tubes with four 550-mm (22-inch) torpedo tubes in the bow and two swivelling external launchers in the rear superstructure, each equipped with one 550-mm and two 400-mm (14-inch) torpedo tubes. The *Surcouf* carried eight 550-mm and four 400-mm reloads, and another 8 X 400-mm torpedoes.

The *Surcouf* also carried a 4.5 m (14 ft. 9 in) motorboat and contained a cargo compartment with fittings to restrain 40 prisoners or lodge 40 passengers. The submarine's fuel tanks were very large; enough fuel for a 10,000 nmi (19,000 km; 12,000 mi) range and supplies for 90-day patrols could be carried.

The *Surcouf's* maximum safe diving depth was 80 metres; however, the boat was capable of diving to 110 meters without notable deformations to its thick hull, with a normal operating depth of 178 m (584ft). Crush depth was calculated at 491 m (1,611ft).

The *Surcouf* was unreliable and suffered from several crucial design defects. She was prone to leaks, particularly within the gun turret, and which seriously affected the trim of the craft when submerged. On more than one occasion, the *Surcouf* dived uncontrollably well below her specified maximum depth of 80 metres but where safe operation was resumed without loss.

Her diesel engines, electric motors and other systems often broke down and spare parts were almost impossible to obtain due to her unique design. In some cases, the problems were an inherent part of the design and could not be resolved.

The additional weight and wind-shear above the deck caused the vessel to roll badly even in a modest swell, making it nearly impossible to assemble and launch the aircraft in all but dead calm conditions. During stormy weather, acid was apt to spill from her batteries.

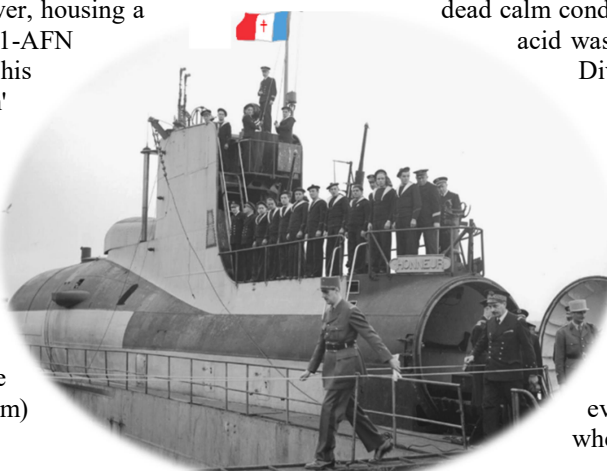
Diving meant securing twenty-four vents and typically took about two and half minutes to complete during which time she was vulnerable to aerial attack. In an age of rapidly developing aircraft with greater capability and range, there were doubts whether *Surcouf* and other vessels of this design could ever operate safely in areas where land-based aircraft could reach. Overall, *Surcouf* was far less than the planners had envisaged, and future development of the design was cancelled. *Surcouf* would remain as a sole member of her class.

From the beginning of the *Surcouf's* career until 1942, the boat was painted of the same grey colour as surface warships, then in Prussian dark blue, a colour which was conserved until the end of 1940 where the boat was repainted with two tons of grey, serving as camouflage on the hull and conning tower.

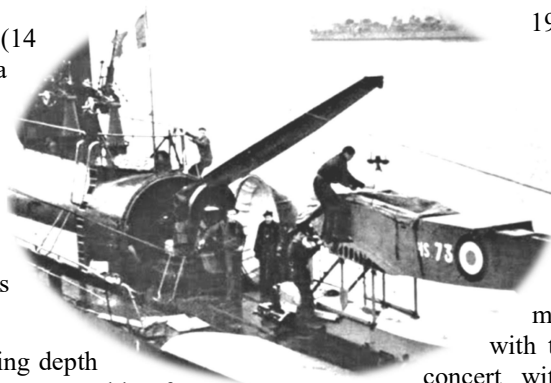
The *Surcouf's* first commanding officer was Capitaine de Frégate (Frigate Captain/Commander) Raymond de Belot. His missions included ensuring contact with the French colonies; working in concert with French naval squadrons to search and destroy enemy fleets, and to pursue enemy convoys.



FS *Surcouf* large guns. Hanger is at rear of conning tower



General Charles de Gaulle departing the *Surcouf* after exiting from the open hangar door. Photo IWM



In 1940, *Surcouf* was based in Cherbourg, but in May, when the Germans invaded, she was being refitted in Brest following a mission in the Antilles and the Gulf of Guinea. Under command of Frigate Captain Martin, unable to dive and with only one engine functioning and a jammed rudder, she limped across the English Channel and sought refuge in Plymouth.

On 3 July 1940, the British, concerned that the French Fleet would be taken over by the German Kriegsmarine at the French armistice, executed Operation Catapult. The Royal Navy blockaded the harbours where French warships were anchored and delivered an ultimatum: re-join the fight against Germany, be put out of reach of the Germans, or scuttle. Few accepted willingly; the North African fleet at Mers-el-Kebir and the ships based at Dakar (West Africa) refused. The French battleships in North Africa were eventually attacked and all but one sunk at their moorings by the Mediterranean Fleet.

French ships lying at ports in Britain and Canada were also boarded by armed marines, sailors and soldiers, but the only serious incident took place at Plymouth aboard *Surcouf* on 3 July, when two Royal Navy submarine officers, Cdr Denis 'Lofty' Sprague, captain of HMS *Thames* and Lt Patrick Griffiths of HMS *Rorqual* and French warrant officer mechanic Yves Daniel were fatally wounded, and a British seaman, Albert Webb, was shot dead by the submarine's doctor.

By August 1940, the British completed *Surcouf*'s refit and turned her over to the Forces Navales Françaises Libres, FNFL (Free French Navy) for convoy patrol. The only officer not repatriated from the original crew, Capitaine de frégate Georges Louis Blaison, became the new commanding officer on 7 October 1941. Because of Anglo-French tensions about the submarine, accusations were made by each side that the other was spying for Vichy France; the British also claimed *Surcouf* was attacking British ships. Later, a British officer and two sailors were put aboard for "liaison" purposes. One real drawback was she required a crew of 110 - 130 men, which represented three crews of more conventional submarines. This led to the Royal Navy's reluctance to recommission her.

The MB.411 was a very compact monoplane with a large central float and two small outriggers under the wings. In order to reduce the hangar requirements she had an unusual tail with the larger part of the vertical rudder mounted below the fuselage instead of above it.

Apparently the Besson floatplane was taken ashore while *Surcouf* was docked in Britain and moved to a nearby dock shed for service. The Besson aircraft was destroyed there during a bombing raid and could not be replaced. For much of its later career, *Surcouf* sailed without the aircraft aboard and with an empty hangar that was a liability rather than an asset.

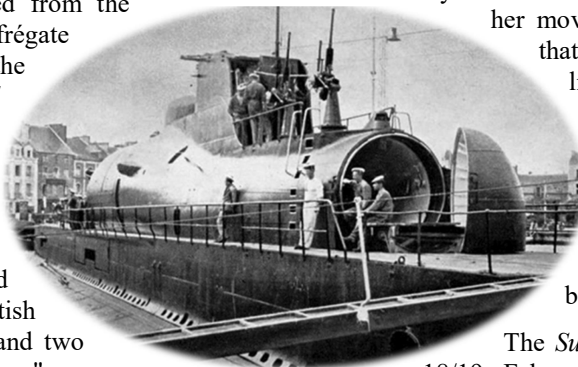
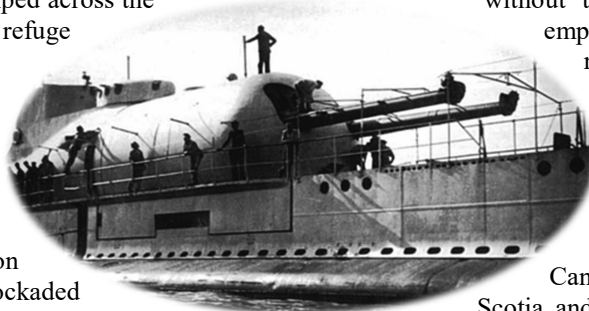
View of the *Surcouf*'s aircraft hangar open and the submarine's anti-aircraft guns elevated vertically, 1936.

Surcouf then went to the Canadian base at Halifax, Nova Scotia and escorted trans-Atlantic convoys. In April 1941, she was damaged by a German plane at Devonport. On 28 July, *Surcouf* went to the United States Naval Shipyard at Portsmouth, New Hampshire for a three-month refit.

After leaving the shipyard *Surcouf* went to New London, Connecticut, perhaps to receive additional training for her crew. *Surcouf* left New London on 27 November to return to Halifax.

In December 1941 *Surcouf* carried the Free French Admiral Emile Muselier to Canada, putting into Quebec City. While the Admiral was in Ottawa, the *Surcouf* sailed to Halifax, where, on 20 December, they joined Free French Escorteurs, the corvettes *Mimosa*, *Aconit* and *Alysse*, and on 24 December, took control of the islands of St. Pierre and Miquelon (south of Newfoundland) for Free France without resistance. In January 1942, the Free French leadership decided to send *Surcouf* to the Pacific theatre, after she had been re-supplied at the Royal Naval Dockyard in Bermuda. However, her movement south triggered rumours that *Surcouf* was going to liberate Martinique from the Vichy regime. In fact, *Surcouf* was bound for Sydney, Australia, via Tahiti. She departed Halifax on 2 February for Bermuda, which she left on 12 February, bound for the Panama Canal.

The *Surcouf* vanished on the night of 18/19 February 1942, about 130 km (70 nmi/80 mi) north of Cristóbal, Colón, while en route for Tahiti, via the Panama Canal. An American report concluded the disappearance was due to an accidental collision with the American freighter Thompson Lykes, steaming alone from Guantanamo Bay, on what was a very dark night. The freighter reported hitting and running down a partially submerged object which scraped along her side and keel. Her lookouts heard people in the water, but the freighter did not stop,



thinking she had hit a U-boat, though cries for help were heard in English. A signal was sent to Panama describing the incident.

Blue Liners

Copied from Facebook

27 January 1989 saw the beginning of the end for the Royal Navy's 'Blue Liner' cigarettes and tobacco.

Blue Liners were so called as they carried a blue line down each cigarette, along with the words 'HM Ships only'. They were issued to seamen in shore bases or on Reserve ships not at sea. Each month every person who had declared themselves as a smoker received three pink cigarette coupons, with each coupon entitling them to 100 cigarettes or a tin of tobacco. Different rules applied for sea-going ships where one was issued six blue coupons. You could get most brands of cigarettes from the NAAFI at duty-free prices - the limit was 600 per month in UK waters, unlimited abroad. A sailor was allowed 25 cigarettes a night when proceeding ashore, or 200 cigarettes if going on leave for seven days or more.

On the reverse of a packet of Blue Liners were the words:

"These cigarettes are supplied duty free for the exclusive use of officers and men of the Royal Navy and are not to be landed, given away or otherwise disposed of contrary to regulations."

Smuggling more than your allowance ashore, was a punishable offence. If you got caught with more than your

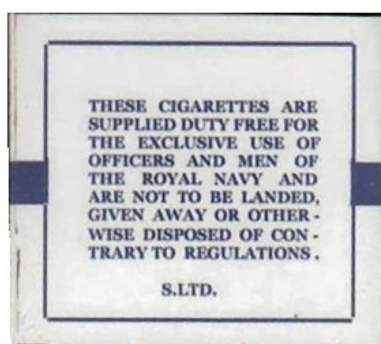
entitlement the punishment varied from a possible seven days in the cells, to three months loss of duty-free privileges, 30 days stoppage of leave and perhaps a fine thrown in for good measure.

Your popularity soared if you didn't smoke; as the coupons were extremely tradeable. You could swap them for submariner's sweaters, chef's t-shirts, DMS boots, - in fact, just about any piece of kit you needed. Plus, apart from selling

your coupons for a bit of extra spending money, it was also possible to find someone to do your duty for you in exchange for one, or more, of your coupons.

DCI(RN) 11/89 signalled the end of the Naval perk though, with the Admiralty deciding that the health and fitness of sailors should take priority over the perk, and that smoking should be discouraged in the face of such strong medical evidence. Over the next two years prices were gradually increased until they

reached the same level as commercial products on general sale. In the early seventies, 300 Blue Liners cost 6 shillings and 6 pence which is about 37p in today's money.



I don't know who did this. I love it.



Such a special year. It needed a logo

A modern Royal Navy ASW corvette based on the WWII Flower-Class

By Nicholas Drummond , Submitted by Shipmate Gord McLennan

This article considers a naval topic that has aroused much recent interest both within and beyond the UK Defence Community: the need for light frigates and corvettes to compensate for a reduced total number of warships. As the UK Ministry of Defence prepares to review bids for its Type 31 frigate requirement, it may be helpful to consider UK requirements in this area by looking back on similar ships produced between 1939 and 1945

At the beginning of the Second World War, the Royal Navy had 332 warships making it the world's largest navy. The fleet included 15 battleships, 7 aircraft carriers, 66 cruisers, 184 destroyers, 45 patrol vessels, and 60 submarines. While the size of the Royal Navy's fleet was a major factor in deterring Hitler's invasion plans in 1940, the Admiralty realised that it was short of small escort vessels for coastal patrol duties. This led to a requirement for an inexpensive inshore vessel that could be produced quickly in large numbers. It also needed to be easy to operate, so it could be crewed by inexperienced sailors. The resulting design, developed by Smith's Docks in Middlesborough, was based on a pre-war whale catcher and dubbed the Flower-Class corvette. It displaced 940 tonnes, measured 62.5 metres in length, and 10 metres in width. Two oil-fired cylindrical boilers powered a 2,050 Kw steam engine giving

the ship a range of 4,650 Nm (6,482 km) at 13 knots. Its top speed of 16 knots (29.6 k/ph) was quite slow relative to larger Navy warships, many of which were capable of 28-30 knots, but it was fast enough to chase a submerged submarine, which typically travelled at around 8 knots (14.9 k/ph).

Artist's impression of what a new Flower Class might look like.



Almost before the first Flowers began to roll down the slipways of sundry British shipyards, it was realised that additional vessels were needed to escort transatlantic convoys. As is so often the case with ships, aircraft and armoured vehicles in time of war, they were pressed into service in a role for which they were not designed.

Illustration of a Flower Class Corvette of WWII, which is possibly HMCS Snowberry.



Fortunately, the Flowers were large enough to negotiate Atlantic in mid-winter, although they rolled easily in rough seas which quickly exhausted their crews.

Flower-Class corvettes packed a remarkable punch for such a small warship. A single BL Mk IX 4" naval gun with 100 rounds of ammunition was mounted on the forecastle, four Mk II depth charge dispensers plus 25 depth charges, and twin .303 Lewis guns were mounted aft. The ships were later modified so that they additionally had a 40mm "pom-pom" anti-aircraft gun on a

Mk VIII bandstand mount amidships, two Oerlikon 20mm cannons on the bridge, and Hedgehog anti-submarine mortars on the foredeck.

During WW2 German U-boats sank about 2,780 ships, totalling of 14.1 million tons in gross tonnage. This figure represents about 70% of all allied shipping losses to hostile action in all theatres of the war. The most successful year was 1942 when over 6 million tons of shipping were sunk in the Atlantic.

Winning the Battle of the Atlantic required Flowers to be fitted with Type 123 ASDIC sonars for detecting German U-boats. These were placed in dome fixed to the hull about 12 metres from the bow. Early Flower-Class ships had an enclosed wheel house on top of the bridge. This was later changed to an open design for better visibility. Refitted ships added a surface radar mounted in a lantern housing behind the bridge. This became very useful for tracking submarines that followed convoys on the surface.

Initially, Flower-Class vessels had a crew of 47, but this was increased to 85, including five officers. The forecastle of refitted versions was lengthened to add additional accommodation for the extra crew.

Flower-Class corvettes were small, inexpensive vessels designed for inshore escort duties. A chronic lack of escorts for the vital North Atlantic convoys resulted in such ships being used in a role for which they were never intended. Despite cramped accommodation, a slow surface speed and a willingness to

roll in even in gentle swells, the Flowers made a crucial difference and saved millions of tons of shipping.

A total of 267 Flower Class corvettes were built between 1939 and 1940. They were operated by British, Canadian, French and US navies. Despite a very high number being built, the design constantly evolved throughout the vessel's service life and it was uncommon for any to be alike in either configuration or appearance.

Between 1939 and 1945, 36 Flower-Class corvettes were lost, of which 22 were torpedoed by enemy U-boats. They accounted for 51 enemy submarines sunk (47 German boats plus 4 Italian). The most successful Royal Navy Flower-Class vessel was HMS Sunflower, which single-handedly sunk U-638 on 5 May 1943 and U-631 on 17 October 1943. It shared in the sinking of a third submarine, U-282, on 29 October 1943. Winston Churchill took great delight in announcing that a Royal Navy vessel with a name that made it sound more like a pleasure cruiser than a warship had sunk three German submarines.

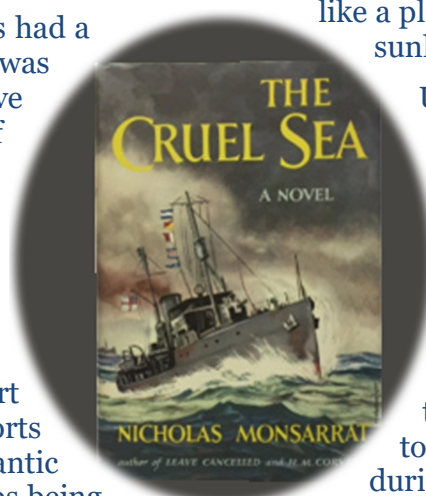
Ultimately, Flower-Class corvettes gave the Royal Navy critical mass at a crucial moment. In doing so, they saved countless lives, millions of tonnes of shipping, and prevented Britain from being starved into surrender. These small corvettes were mediocre ships at best, but they represented almost 50% of total number of allied escort vessels during WW2. The significant contribution made by the Flowers was graphically depicted by the 1952 war film "The Cruel Sea" starring Jack Hawkins and



HMS Meadowsweet



Jack Hawkins in the film "The Cruel Sea"



Denholm Elliott. Based on the novel of the same name by Nicholas Monserrat, it ranks among the greatest of British war movies.

As the war progressed, the operational experience gained by Flower-Class crews provided useful feedback that enabled the Royal Navy to design and build a range of vastly superior frigates and destroyers, such as the River-Class frigate. These vessels displaced 1,390 tonnes, were faster, with greater endurance and improved seakeeping abilities; but their weapons and sensors were similar in capability to those fitted to Flower-Class ships. The Loch-Class frigate, which entered service in 1944, had better weapons and sensors (including the Squid anti-submarine mortar which fired depth charges ahead of the vessel), but by this time, the tide had turned in the North Atlantic. Though unsophisticated, even by 1940 naval standards, Flower-Class corvettes proved to be the right ship at the right time.

Today, Britain has the 5th largest navy behind the USA, Russia, China, and Japan. It currently possesses 74 vessels including 2 aircraft carriers, 6 destroyers, 13 frigates, 11 submarines, 2 commando assault ships, 13 MCM vessels, 22 patrol boats and 5 survey ships. Although today's Royal Navy warships are much better equipped than their forbears, 19 surface combatants is an extremely low number to fulfil the many roles essential to the United Kingdom's maritime defence and security. In terms of critical mass, the Royal Navy may now be too small.

With a vastly increased naval threat posed by Russia and China, a major conflict would require Britain to address the same problem it faced at the beginning of WW2: a shortage of ships capable of detecting and destroying submarines. It is unlikely but not impossible that Britain might have to fight a third battle of the North Atlantic. Regardless, the threats we face have evolved and are significant. China has 59 submarines, including the sophisticated Yuan-Class diesel electric boats, while Russia has 58.

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