

HMS OPOSSUM F33

PRESIDENT:- REAR ADM D J MACKENZIE CB.

CHAIRMAN:- SAJ Stan Oldfield

NEWSLETTER SUMMER 1998

1945 - 58

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Editors Comments

Another reunion over and what a weekend it was, I am sure that all those shipmates who attended really did enjoy themselves. From the comments that I heard, it was the best venue that we have had up to now. The dedication of the H.M.S Opossum standard went off without a hitch, thanks mainly to the excellent work and organising of Peter Lockwood. An article on the dedication is given a little later in this newsletter. The venue for our 1999 reunion was decided at the AGM, this being Scarborough. I hope to make it the first weekend in May 1999. To help me I would appreciate it if all shipmates would let me know A.S.A.P whether or not they think they will be attending, please co-operate with me by not leaving it too late in letting me know.

SUBSCRIPTIONS.

Well shipmates another year another fiver is requested from all shipmates who were not at the reunion or who never coughed up when they were. You will appreciate (I hope) that an association will not run on fresh air, if you wish to keep on receiving newsletters etc then please pay your dues, its only the cost of 2. 1/2 pints after all, where else could you get such good value for money?

HMS Opossum inaugral Golf Tournament 1998.

The golf tournament was played at the Teign Valley Golf Club over a period of three days 18-20 May inclusive, a very difficult course for someone still displaying their 'L Plates', after the 1st round the leader board stood as thus:- 1. Stan (Olazabal) Oldfield, 2. Tom (Where's my ball) Carter, 3. Tom (Two ball) Tolson, 4. Harry (Birdie) Catterson and bringing up the rear Willie (Frozen shoulder) Mitchell. From the original eight entries only five made it to the 1st tee. At the end of the second round the leader board had changed slightly with only Stan remaining unchallenged. It was only during the final round that Harry (Birdie) Catterson found his swing after much cussing (but with very little luck).

Approaching the 18th tee Stan was still the leader with Tom (Where's my ball) Carter lying second and yours truly third. After a superb drive off the 18th tee Harry was within about 30 yards from the flag and was down the hole in 2 more shots, with Tom Carter in a little trouble in the rough and consequently being relegated to third place one point behind. The final positions were as follows:- Winner: 96 points Stan (Olazabal) Oldfield, R/Up 76 points Harry (Birdie) Catterson, 3rd 75 points Tom (Where's my ball) Carter, 4th 49 points Willie (Frozen shoulder) Mitchell with Tom (Two ball) Tolson in final position with with 38 points. The winner received his prize at the 19th hole and was presented with a lead

crystal, silver plated rose bowl, with the two runners up each receiving a boxed set of 4 golf balls which incidently should see Tom Carter over the next two holes that he plays. Many thanks to the shipmates who took part in a very enjoyable game of golf in very hot and difficult conditions. I hope that next year we will have a few more shipmates taking part, I know that a few of you do play, who knows we may have a presidents cup or something to play for, all those interested please let me know, all comments are welcome.

BLOODY BIG THANK YOU

to you and all the committee - though on second thoughts, this ought to go to the chairman....so if you would give him a shout, no doubt on the 3rd hole with his tenth putt having an upteenth pee...no....ah well....pass on my message and tell him and everyone that I had a most enjoyable time.

I know only too well the time, effort and heartache that goes into organising a successful event - and I know it is easy for everyone to stand up and clap when votes of thanks are bandied around.

Thats the easy bit, but take it from me, a lot of shipmates and their wives were impressed, and a lot of it is due to you and your team.

Thank you again, and please give my regards to your wife, and my sympathy to the chairman and hope his wife rallies soon.

Two items overheard:-

1. My most attentive grandson was listening to his mother carefully explaining the ceremony as it took place most smoothly on Sunday morning in the drill shed. And when I went up to the rostrum to read the lesson - he asked out loud "Is grandad going to be a judge like the other man?". He had been shown a picture of a judge at school and related the Chaplain and his robes and white hair etc to a judge - and thought that I was following suit!!!

Many thanks to shipmate Peter Shore for the above.

I would be very grateful for your comments on the recent reunion and the dedication service of H.M.S. Opossum standard, do you think we received value for money,? what were your emotions at the dedication,? could there have been something else we could have done to make it more successful,? for my part I think all those shipmates who participated in the actual ceremony did a first class and professional job considering the amount of rehearsal time available. Take a bow Sam, Peter, Willie, John and Stan.

H.M.S. OPOSSUM F33

Minutes of the AGM held at the Trecarn Hotel Babbacombe 16th May 1998

The meeting opened with "UP SPIRITS" with a toast proposed by shipmate Peter Lockwood to the Queen, our association and absent friends.

A one minutes silence followed with all shipmates upstanding in memory of past shipmates who have crossed the 'Bar', John C Cartwright- -John Eardley-Wilmott- -Ronald Bradley- -Albert Corless- -Les Wood- -Harry (Scouse) Barlow- -and Bob Gray. We are sure there must be more shipmates who have left us, but as our Chairman says, we do not know with any certainty who they are.

Shipmates attending their first reunion were then asked to stand and please give their names and commission which were as follows:- John C Clark 1947- -Tom Tolson 1952 (after a bit of banter)- -Ron Blundy 1952- -Brian Healey 1956, with guffaws from Harry Roach, Dick Jay 1954. A welcome to you all.

Apologies were received from Bill Bolton- -Bert Rimmer- -Jack Marshall- -Ken Slater- -Keith Merrick- -Ron Hare- -George Swanwick- -Ivan C Haskell- -Ivor Williams- -Don Hedley and our president John Mackenzie. A number of 'Get Well' cards are to be passed around for those who were too ill to attend, all shipmates present will be able to sign these. Keith Merrick, Ron Hare and Adm Mackenzie all send their best regards and hope to attend our next reunion in 1999.

The Chairman went on to say :- I would like you all to put your hands together and give a vote of thanks to Harry for the work that he has done, it is not an easy job considering that he had a mild stroke in January gone. Thanks were also given to all the committee members who attended the Trecarn Hotel in January at their 'Showcase Weekend' where the facilities were given the once over, this was very beneficial in respect to our date with the Trecarn in May, these members were named as:- Stan Oldfield, Harry Catterson, Sam Edgar and Peter Lockwood, members present showed their appreciation with applause.

The subject of Eden camp was brought up and Stan gave a description of what to expect if you were to visit, the camp is situated at Malton N Yorks just through Pickering. A model of HMS Opossum which was donated by Rosemary Corless is on show there in a theme about the war in Korea, hut 13 is where the exhibit for the Korean war is staged and will be fully functional by 1999. For those who attend the next reunion at Scarborough a 30 minute car ride is all that is required to reach Eden camp, Willie Mitchell (who else?)enquired whether there was a bar situated in the camp; YES was the answer.

The secretary/treasurer then read out a letter from the Federation of Naval Associations who were asking for a donation towards setting up their exhibition which was to be held in Portsmouth during the Festival of the Sea (Navy Days), after some discussion, even though we are members of this association, the motion to make a donation was defeated.

A transaction report was then passed around which covered from Jan 1st 1998, total assets at this moment in time stand at £499.70. A motion was passed to record in the minutes, 100% support for Harrys work and a wonderful effort.

Treasurers report accepted. Next on the agenda was the venue for next years reunion, after a lengthy discussion it was proposed by Tom Tolson that Scarborough be the destination for the 1999 reunion and that the committee find the hotel best suited, Scarborough was carried unanimously.

Election of the committee:- The chairman asked shipmates present whether they wanted a change of committee, Peter Shore proposed that we re-elect the committee en-bloc, this motion was seconded by Lewis Trinder and passed.

The floor was then given to shipmate Peter Lockwood who was to inform everyone present, the procedure regarding the dedication of our standard. It was also proposed that shipmate Mike Cole be made the first life member of our association for the savings in cost which he had acheived in obtaining the neccessary items required to complete the standard, this was proposed by Peter Lockwood and was carried unanimously. It was then that shipmates were selected for various duties at the dedication service. Standard bearer Sam Edgar, Escorts shipmates Maurice Wood and Harry Roach, Presenter shipmate Stan Craven, Collectors during the service,shipmates Willie Mitchell and John McCarron, and finally the lesson to be read by shipmate Peter Shore. On completion of the service everyone would retire to the Senior Rates Mess of HMS Drake for refreshments during which a presentation from HMS Opossum association would be made by our chairman to the president of the mess and this was reciprocated with the presentation of a plaque of HMS Drake to Stan our chairman.

Any other business:- The secretary asked the question of how our standard would be transported in the event of it being required elsewhere, Sam Edgar volunteered to make sure that this would be no problem and that he would see that it was sent to wherever it was needed. It was also noted that the HMS Opossum association standard be insured owing to the high cost of a replacement should this be necessary. Harry our secretary will put this into operation, the cost which I believe is in the region of £10.00 per annum. There being no further business the meeting closed at 14.16hrs.



Standard Dedication



Stan receiving the Winners Trophy from Harry.

Newsletter:- The size of the next newsletter is in some doubt, the main cause of this is the lack of interesting articles which I am able to get hold of, I would like to say that a lot of you must have some entertaining and interesting recollections of life in the Andrew, why not write it down and send it to me. Something else which I would like to see is a letters page, any grouses, suggestions etc, as I have said before, I could fill the pages with a lot of rubbish, but who would read it?

A rather nervous woman getting into the dentist's chair stated, "I'd rather have a baby than a tooth out".

"Make up your mind quick", said the dentist, "as I'll have to adjust the chair".

I shook hands with faith healer the other day and broke two fingers.

The best distance between two points is cleavage.

I have recently come across a letter sent to me by Ian Janes which was written in 1994, in it Ian says I shall not be coming to your reunion, this was in the belief that it was only for members of the 1952 commission, that has now been rectified, Ian has attended reunions since and will also be at Babbacombe. I was very pleased to receive from Ian the book on the 1952-54 commission which I kept for myself, back in those dark days I couldn't afford the price of the book, so many thanks Ian, apparently when the relief crew took over in 1954 this book was left in a locker, well seeing as that was over forty years ago no claims can be entertained, in other words I keep it!

Regarding the 1954-56 commission Ian goes on to tell me of the flight out to the Far East by Sunderland flying boat leaving from Southampton they made regular stops starting in Malta, then on to Cyprus, Bahrain, Karahli, Trincomalee and then Singapore where they stayed in HMS Terror for a couple of days during which the plane was serviced by the RAF. Leaving Singapore we made our way to Saigon, recalls Ian, which was to be the final stop before Hongkong. We spent a few pleasant hours with the French at their sea-plane base before departing for Hongkong. After about an hours flight one of the engines caught fire (so much for RAF servicing)! A return to Saigon was required where we were accommodated in a large hotel in Saigon City. It wasn't all that pleasant there, because the French were still engaged in war with the Vietcon. It must have been nearly a week before 2 RAF Valetta aircraft were able to return us to Singapore. A few more days were spent in "Terror" before the RAF took us to Borneo and Manila in the Phillipines finally arriving at Kai Tak airport about 14 days late much to the annoyance of the 1952 crew patiently waiting to fly home to the UK. Anyhow, on my arrival in the Seaman P.Os mess I found your commission book in my locker, I've kept it safely ever since and once again enjoyed reading it. Like the 1952 commission, we were a very happy and sporty ship (winners of the small ship cock and among other successes in the Rugby and football venues). I've got fine memories of my time in the Far East and the Royal Navy. Now retired Ian and his wife are enjoying re-tirement and in good health.

"A Little light Relief" (By Harry Roach)

On our first visit to Sasebo, Chiefs and P.Os were made Honorary members of the U.S Army Sergeants Club. To see what it was like, several of us paid a visit in the afternoon, it was typical "Night Clubbish", carpeted, tables and chairs, tiered on three sides of a smallish dance floor, the lighting was soft and warm.

The only person besides ourselves, was the person behind the bar to whom we got into conversation. He turned out to be the manager, who after we had a couple of drinks informed us that the club was mostly deserted in the afternoon, but would be packed in the evening (Saturday) as there was to be a strip-show, of course we invited ourselves. When we arrived for the evening entertainment the club was quite full, so we availed ourselves of the best positions we could find. Eventually the show came on, and to the music, things came off. When the last piece of clothing (briefs) to come off was about to happen, the place was plunged into darkness. The lights came on again after a short while but the floor space was deserted, we felt cheated.

On our return to the Korean coast we talked about that Saturday evening and we got our heads together and devised a plot.

Next time we went to Sasebo we were ashore like a shot to the club and found out that there was a strip show on the Saturday evening. On the evening in question we went to the club armed with our "Secret Weapons" as early as possible to be able to get floor side tables. The last item at the show was the strip and as it neared it's end, our "Secret Weapons" were made ready. As the last piece of clothing was about to be removed, out went the lights, and our Secret Weapons (deck torches) came on, the girls yells were piercing, but the applause from the crowd was deafening. Our plot earned us a drink from the manager.

Christmas 1945

'Twas Christmas 1945, the wars in Europe and the Pacific were both thankfully over, and this peaceful state found me on board His Majesty's Sloop Opossum carrying out liason duties attached to the United States Fleet at the top end of Subic Bay on Luzon the main island of the Phillipines. Subic Bay itself being bounded by Bataan Peninsular to the west of Corregidor Island to the South and the mainland to the North and East.

The waters of Subic Bay were crystal clear and a full 20 fathoms deep. The coral bottom seemed, through the magnifying effect of the water to be only an arms length away, and provided sunny warm safe swimming although many bodies came out in red rashes from being bitten by water fleas, the scene not a bit like or in keeping with a traditional Xmas.

As we had been here a while it came about that our fare for Christmas dinner was provided by U.S. stores, this came as frozen chickens (a new innovation at that time and never before seen by us sailors) in wooden cases crammed with about 20 chickens in each, and stamped on the outside 'MINNISOTA', the chickens worked out at 1 for each 2 men. They had been plucked of feathers but frozen with their heads, feet and intestines intact. Our feeding system was Canteen Messing, which as you will know meant each Mess prepared its own food and the galley did the cooking.

I was Leading Seaman in charge of a Mess of 15 shipmates who, after a conference on how to approach the preparation for cooking this never before seen state of chicken, it was decided to pair the men and give them their chicken for their own preparation work before sending them collectively to the galley for cooking.

Picture the scene, 8 pairs of young men with frozen, feather headed chicken complete with glaring eyes and yellow legs completely full with unwanted 'STUFFING'- think about it. I can tell you a lot of sailors didn't want their Christmas dinner and made do with 'Admiralty Ham' (corned beef). No I'll never forget Christmas 1945.

I am sorry to say that the name of the shipmate who supplied the above contribution has slipped my mind, I will try to rectify this at a later date. Harry.

Humour Page

The tragic day arrives when the U.S President pops his clogs- -by chance, in the same week as the Pope. Unfortunately, there is a mix up in the paper work at the Pearly Gates, and Bill Clinton is admitted into Heaven while the Pope is sent to the other place. The mistake is soon sorted out. On the ascent into the clouds, the Pope passes Clinton on the way down. His Holiness offers the President his sympathy, but adds:- "I must admit I'm overjoyed. I've always wanted to meet the Virgin Mary." "Shucks," says the President. "Your just 24 hours too late."

THE INTELLIGENCE TEST

In the past we thought it might be a good idea to give our committee an intelligence test to safeguard our association affairs, but after only one test it had to be dropped. This is why!!!

Q. If it is four miles from Torquay to Paignton. How many miles is it from Paignton to Torquay?

A. Yes, but would that be if you were travelling by bus?

Q. Travel by bus if you want to.

A. But that's no good, the bus does not come down our road anymore. They took the bus off last year.

Q. Believe me that doesn't really matter.

A. That's what you think, I mean you probably have a car. I'm stuck in the house, depending on one of the members to give me a lift. It's alright for you to talk, but if you had to do what I have to do, you wouldn't like it.

Q. What I mean is, it does not matter as far as the question is concerned. You can travel by bike if you want to.

A. No, that wouldn't be any good, I haven't got a bike.

Q. Look, forget about the bus, forget about the bike, if you walked from Torquay to Paignton, how many miles would it be?

A. Good lord man! I couldn't walk from here to the bottom of the road. I'm

killed with pain, I've had more tablets, seen more doctors, they couldn't do a thing for me.

Q. How you travel has no bearing on how many miles it is from Torquay to Paignton.

A. Does it not?

Q. No.

A. Yes, let me see now, I'm just thinking they run a mini-bus from Torquay every year for the Senior Citizens to get their bus passes. Would it be alright if I went on that?

Q. That would be fine, Yes.

A. Would it make any difference who is driving the mini-bus?

Q. I do not see how the driver of the mini-bus can make any difference to the answer.

A. I just thought some of the drivers might know a short cut.

Q. I'm sorry, but this is taking far too long, I'll have to press you for an answer

A. Yes, I see, what was the question again?

Q. THE QUESTION IS, HOW MANY MILES IS IT FROM TORQUAY TO PAIGNTON?

A. I'll make guess, would it be seven?

Q. That's not the answer I have here, I'm sorry.

POLICE MESSAGE.

You are warned to be on the look-out for Joseph Gomez, a Spaniard, last heard of living in Tooting, whose mother was a Nun in Barcelona. A one^{time} flautist with a symphony orchestra, he is wanted for looting in Haifa, where he worked on a ranch. The police urge people to be on the look-out for a Haifa looting fluting Tooting son of a nun from Barcelona, part time cowboy Joe.

STRANGE BUT TRUE. For the crew of a Japanese fishing boat the sky wasn't raining cats and dogs, it was raining cows. During what can only be described as a bizarre incident off Russia's east coast, a Japanese fishing boat was sunk by a cow free-falling from the sky. The fishermen weren't hurt but

incredulous Russian authorities arrested them after hearing their story. But according to the Daily Telegraph in Britain, further investigation confirmed the story. Russian soldiers had apparently used a transport plane to steal cattle. Once airborne, the cattle moved about the aircraft, throwing it off balance. Fearing for their safety the crew lowered the loading bay and chased the cows out over the open sea.

A girl got on a crowded bus and asked a man for his seat, explaining, "I'm going to have a baby." "Oh really, I'm a father myself. When is the baby due?" She sank into the seat smiling and sighing with relief, and replied, "In nine months. It just happened, and boy, am I tired."

The owner of a big furniture store went to London to buy some stock and met a really beautiful girl in the hotel lift. But she was French and they couldn't understand a word of each others language. So she took a pencil and note-book and drew a sketch of a taxi. She nodded her head and laughed so they went for a ride in the park. Then he drew a picture of a table in a restaurant with a question mark and she nodded, so they went to dinner. After dinner he sketched two dancers and she was delighted. They went to a night club and danced and had a lovely evening. At length she motioned for the pencil and drew a picture of a four poster bed. He was dumbfounded. He's never been able to figure out how she knew he was in the furniture business.

The subject of discussion among the girls was the effect of alcohol upon them. One remarked, "If I take one drink, I can feel it, if I take two drinks, I can feel it a little- - but if I take three drinks - anybody can feel it.

"What part of the human body," asked the Anatomy professor, "is harder than steel?" Nobody in the class volunteered the information, so he looked in the direction of a young student and asked, "Can you tell me, Miss Dolen. She blushed deep scarlet and lowered her eyes, murmuring "Oh please don't ask me to answer that professor!" Crisply, he said, "The answer is the tissue of the nails. And you Miss Dolen," he added with a sigh, "are an optimist.

A LEG BYE:- At Greenwich Hospital, a home for retired sailors, two teams organised a cricket match. At the end of the day, the winners had won by 103 runs. Nothing unusual about that, you might say. Well, the losers had all lost an arm — and the winners were all one legged

Standard of 'OPOSSUM'

By Eddie Summerfold

In the Spring of 1996 at the Nottingham Gateway hotel of an 'Opossum' reunion, a tentative suggestion was put forward regarding a ships standard. But not until eighteen months later, November 1997, did various elements combine together to look into purchasing such an official Standard, committee approval of costs and to have such a standard properly dedicated. This involved committee members, with shipmates Mike Cole and Peter Lockwood playing principal parts. It was your secretary Harry who finally ordered the actual standard after shopping around and obtaining the best possible price, with Peter volunteering to look after the organising of the actual dedication ceremony, the reason for this was the distance Peter lived from Plymouth made it much easier for him to co-ordinate and liaise between HMS Opossum association and HMS Drake.

It would be as well at this stage to highlight what importance is attached to a ships Standard. Firstly it's a symbol of our brotherhood a most important item of significance, a rallying point and when dedicated a representation of our duty to God, the Queen and our Country; wherein all present pledge to uphold these ideals. On a more practical plane this really means the 'H.M.S.Opossum Association' has finally arrived. To have our Standard dedicated at H.M.S.Drake, the Commodore had to be formally approached by shipmate Peter Lockwood, together with the Chaplain, and permission sort to have a buffet lunch in the Senior Rates Mess. A number of letters and phone calls later, everything was almost at hand for the big day. At the 'Opossum Association' Annual General Meeting held on the Saturday afternoon at the Trecam hotel after outlining the following days ceremony, Peter asked for volunteers to make up the official party, time now for a rehearsal.

On an already sweltering hot Sunday morning, 17th May 1998, our party all fully booted and spurred, suits - blazers, with medals, shiny shoes and all wearing 'Opossum' ties left the Trecam hotel in Babbacombe mostly by coach but a few by car and headed for Plymouth. Thoughts of many prepared to be immersed in buckets of nostalgia. Could 'Guzz' barracks ever change? thankfully not, basically the old girl still looks the same, light grey Devon granite, stout three storey buildings are just as remembered, sloping streets. Sadly apart from the gate staff very few of the local population are to be seen, must have their 'heads down'. At last the coach pulls onto the terrace overlooking what was once the old parade ground, now a vast car park with numbered billets. Nearby St Nicholas church is undergoing refurbishment so our 'little ceremony' will take place in the 'Drill Shed'. Inside the low roofed spacious interior, freshly painted, with a newish 'power floated' smooth concrete floor, some naval exhibits, a figure head or two and the huge wall coverings of

ships lost in action manned by Devonport ratings; a dias, podium and chairs are already laid out for our ceremony to be given before nearly 80 guests.

The Reverend David Barlow R.N. enters and guests take their seats. To the rear our Standard party with shipmate Sam Edgar wearing an Opossum beret, leather flag holster and white gauntlets carries the furled standard. He is flanked by escorts shipmates Maurice Wood and Harry Roach, Willie Mitchell and John McCarron are to take an official collection on behalf of a Royal Navy Charity 'Alexandra House' who specialise in the needs of naval families whose parents through exceptional circumstances are temporarily away from home. Each of the assembled guests has been given a green order of service leaflet. After a short welcome by the Chaplain the service of dedication begins.

The hymn 'Lead us Heavenly Father lead us' is followed by the Chaplain giving the 'Bidding'. Shipmate Stan Craven is our official Presenter and formally requests that our standard be officially dedicated and blessed. The Standard party march forward. After responses by the Chaplain and all those present he unfurls the standard and places it at the altar. At a given signal the sweet notes of the 'Last Post' reach every corner of the drill shed. Played by an ex Royal Marine, who, suitably dressed in civilian clothes, played without a wrong note, he did a superb professional job and as an encore follows this with the traditional Naval reveille.

Shipmate Peter Shore did a first class reading of the lesson taken from Psalm 107, verses 23-30. The Chaplain returns the dedicated Standard to the leather holster of Sam Edgar. The Standard Party do a smart about turn and retire. Singing of the National Anthem brings the ceremony to a close. The entire affair went off without a hitch and reflects great credit on those shipmates who put in long hours of effort over a considerable period to achieve such a satisfactory result. Before the shipmates headed for refreshments at the Senior Rates Mess (formerly the Chiefs and P.Os mess) a 'photograph call', during which as well as individual pictures and groups, shipmate Spike Hughes captured the assembled guests on video tape. At the pleasant bar/lounge a presentation was made by our Chairman shipmate Stan Oldfield of a framed picture of the Spithead Review 1954?, and a ships crest of H.M.S. Drake was given in return. Since there was only a handful of male and female Chiefs and Petty Officers present, the Sunday lunchtime bar takings would have been negligible- if it wasn't for our lot!

We returned to Babbacombe, so ending a memorable reunion.

(The title 'Standard of 'Opossum' is based on a march tune often used at Divisions of H.M.S. Drake in the 1950's played by the resident Blue Jacket band.

At the order 'March off the Guard' the band would strike up 'Standard of St George').

(I would like to give my own personal thanks to Eddie for the above article and to all shipmates who took part in the above memorable day, Truly a one off. Very well done.

Shipmates Profile

Maurice (Slinger) Wood:- I joined H.M.S. *Opossum* at Chatham as an O/D (not stroppy) Telegraphist with the rest of the crew. Having already served in three destroyers I was not very impressed with my 'new' ship. In fact, at first, I don't think I had a single kind word to say about her. Like most sailors of the day, it didn't take long before I would not have a bad word said about her, after all she was MY SHIP.

I was not to serve the full 1952-54 commission in her, for, having been rated up to Telegraphist and the Korean War over (well a truce anyway) we were over complement of telegraphists and I found myself taking passage in a sister ship (H.M.S.

Sparrow) to Singapore to join *Kranji Wireless Station*. I well remember the send off I had from *Opossum*... it might have had something to do with the rough weather *Sparrow* encountered the following day. Didn't touch my tot for days!

Kranji was quite a nice number, but, I wanted to get back to sea (how foolish we are when young!), so after three months and a swop draft I joined H.M.S. *Consort D76*, in which I completed my one and only foreign commission.

Back in the UK I joined HMS *Goldcrest* which, for the unknowing, was a Royal Naval Air Station called Brawdy near to Haverfordwest in Pembrokeshire. Then to the Royal Naval Signal School at St Budeaux for the Leading Telegraphists course and thence to HMY *Britannia*.

Promotion in HMY *Britannia* usually being through the 'dead mans shoes' method I was fortunate to get my 'hook' when the Telegraphist first in line onboard decided he wanted to buy himself out and therefore refused his promotion. My gain, if not his loss!

During my time in *Britannia* she carried out her first circumnavigation of the world, visiting ports in West, South, and East Africa, Seychelles, Mauritius, Malaya, Papua-New Guinea, Australia, New Zealand, Antarctica, the Falklands, South Georgia, Tristan da Cunha, St Helan, Ascension Isles, Lisbon (Portugal) before making our way back to the UK.

1958 saw me in civvy street where I did a short spell with the GPO before joining the CEGB progressing from general clerical duties to stores accounts to Computer Control. A short spell with the Birmingham Regional Hospital Board in 1967-69 then into the real commercial world with a medium sized manufacturing company, Laughton & Sons where I stayed until retiring at the end of last year (1997). The various jobs I held were:- Computer Operations Manager, Stores Manager and Computer Data Base Administrator. Well, it gave me a living and I didn't get my hands dirty.

Hobbies? Babs and I both spent many years in the scout movement with Babs being awarded both the Medal of Merit and the Silver Acorn with yours truly receiving the Medal of Merit.

On leaving the Scouts we ran a Boys Club for seven years and on leaving that in 1989 I have been fully involved with my local Royal Naval Association Branch having been in turn, Social Secretary, Soc Sec & Treasurer, Treasurer and now, their General Secretary. Just in case that is not enough to keep me busy, in my spare time I am also a member of the Association of Royal Yachtsmen, a member of the BKVA Birmingham Branch

and of course our own association. *Maurice J Wood*.

Dear Harry,

I hope this finds you and yours all well, I wish to thank you once again for attending Rons funeral and for the lovely floral arrangement F33.

The enclosed is a request from Ron, the wording in his will was:- "I give to HMS *Opossum* association £100 for all shipmates at their next reunion to have a tot on me".

I am sorry that I will not be attending the reunion this year. I will be away all April in the U.S and Canada with my family, my uncle will be celebrating his 90th birthday and at the last count, 24 family members will be gathered in California, all coming from far and near. At the moment I am in the midst of moving house, I am having an apartment built which will be less worry for me.

I find it very hard to cope without Ron, he was a wonderful husband and I miss him so very much.

Ron Hare is waiting to go into hospital for a heart by pass, Ron and his wife Kathie have been a tower of strength to us ever since the day Ron appeared on the doorstep with the raffle prizes my Ron had won at the *Opossum* reunion, we had to laugh, we intended the money for the kitty, not for raffle tickets.

Ron so enjoyed the reunions he attended, this year, I know, he will be there with you all in spirit, wishing everyone a very happy and enjoyable time at Babbacombe. I send my kindest regards to all. *Sincerely, Margaret.*

POLYGAMOUS PERIL

An African Chief sent his heir to London to be educated. The boy happily divided his days between the classroom and the West End until he was suddenly recalled home as his father had died. One thing he was certain of was to take home a British King-size bed to accommodate a King-size Harem.

The tribe turned out to greet their new ruler who arrived with massive packing cases. As soon as the formalities were over he ordered that the new bed be erected in the Royal Hut in the Royal Kraal, but here arose a problem, as much of the space was taken up by a huge throne made of logs. At the order to take it outside there was much wailing and gnashing of teeth from the Witchdoctor, who proclaimed that it had been there since time immemorial and could not be removed from the hut otherwise the Royal Line would die out. After a great deal of discussion it was agreed to leave it in the hut, but to suspend it from rafters with hastily made ropes. All went well for some time, but one night the young Chief was in bed with four of his favourite wives when the throne came crashing down killing the lot of them.

Hence the saying:- **PEOPLE WHO LIVE IN GRASS HOUSES SHOULDN'T STOW THRONES.**

Question

Which British Aircraft Carrier operated with the American navy in the Pacific under the name USS Robin?

1. Noah's wife was Joan of Ark
2. The Epistles were the wives of the Apostles.
3. One of the *Opossums* was St Mathew.

Did anyone of you ever meet No.3 on board - asks Slinger?

THE HISTORY OF GROG

or, the tale of "Old Grogam," Admiral Edward Vernon.

GROG.

This is the original drink which came down to us through the history of Pussers Rum in the Royal Navy. For more than 300 years, Great Britain's Royal Navy issued Pussers Rum to their sailors on board their ships every day. Seamen drank the neat spirit in drams, one gulp with no heel-taps, a practice inconsistent with shipboard work and sobriety and the cause of many accidents in the rigging when ships were at sea. In an attempt to solve this problem, an admiral by the name of Edward Vernon, (nicknamed "Old Grog" on account of the grogam cloak that he wore when the weather was up) consulted his captains and surgeons on board his ship, and on August 21st, 1740, he ordered that the men's issue of Pussers Rum should be diluted with water in the ratio of 2 of water to 1 of rum, and that those with good conduct could receive lime juice and sugar "that it be made more palatable to them." Needless to say, the Jack Tars were greatly offended by the watered rum, and began referring to it contemptuously as "Grog" from the name they'd already given Vernon. Thus true grog was born in 1740 which until recently was issued daily. When you drank this one, you really were drinking what we call *Liquid History*. And it tasted darned good.

Into an old fashioned glass filled with ice:-

1tot (2-1/2 ounces) Pussers Rum, 1 teaspoon unrefined brown sugar, 2 tots of good water or soda water, Squeeze a large wedge of lime and float the expended lime on top. Stir and enjoy.

History - Uniform Changes

(from an article by Commander David Hobbs MBE. RN.)

Ratings:-

A uniform rig for ratings was first set down by the Admiralty as recently as 1857. This did not differentiate between senior and junior ratings except in the badges worn on the left sleeve since all those dressed as seamen were to wear square rig. 'Idlers', defined as those incapable of manning the guns, masts and yards to fight the ship, were not deemed worthy of square rig and were dressed in a rudimentary form of fore and aft rig.

Slops:-

Before 1857, it had been the practice to sell 'slop' or ready made clothing to seamen on board HM Ships. This clothing lacked uniformity and its fashion and colour varied with the period and whim of the contractor. In the reign of Queen Anne for instance, seamen tended to be dressed in red and grey but by the middle of the eighteenth century blue had become the commonest colour.

This came about as only indigo based dyes offered a reasonable degree of colour fastness to sunlight and wear at a time when the range of available dyes was limited and when adequate means of assessing colour fastness did not exist. Now, indigo, which is extracted from a tropical plant, appeared in the UK as trade with India expanded in the eighteenth century and it is no coincidence that this is when blue uniforms became most common - replacing a motley collection of colours and shades in use before then. During the French revolutionary wars from 1778 to 1815, commanding officers began to pay more attention to their men's clothing requirements and by 1800 it was common for ships companies to be mustered at divisions 'all in blue' or 'all in white' so giving a fair degree of uniformity between ships as the men made their clothes from the 'standard' blue, white or 'fancy' cloth sold by the pusser. (The latter might be tartan, check, gingham etc, and all have been worn at sea at some stage). There was still plenty of room for variations,

however, and in the 1830s the captain of HMS Vernon ordered his seamen to wear red serge frocks and comforters. After some time in commission the stock ran out and red garments were then allocated to the port watch, the starboard wearing blue (not green which was significantly more difficult and thus expensive to dye). The captain of HMS Blazer ordered his men to wear blue and white striped Guernsey's and the captain of HMS Trincomalee followed with red shirts and 'fancy' hats. Most eccentric of all was Captain Wilmott of HMS Harlequin who, as recently as 1853, paid for his boat's crew to be dressed as harlequins. This attracted ribald comments from the press and, no doubt, his boat's crew and may have prompted the Admiralty to issue its circular on ratings uniform in 1857.

Sailor's Collar

The sailor's collar deserves a special mention. Tarred pig tails disappeared rapidly after 1815 and the last is recorded as having been seen at sea in 1827. On the other hand, the first broad collars were worn after 1830. Contrary to popular belief, therefore, the two were never worn together. The first collars were not cut square but were round and closely resembled items that were fashionable ashore. The three rows of white tape were probably added for ornament at first, surviving records mention some discussion about whether there should be two rows or three. The more familiar square collar developed as it was easier for the men to cut and sew themselves than the round variety.

Bell Bottom Trousers

Bell bottomed trousers were another 'icon' of the square rig uniform. These were practical garments for men who worked sailing ships since they could be rolled up securely to clear the feet and ankles when working the rigging. In common with all other items of a sailor's kit, trousers were kept folded ready for use in a kit bag. Kept inside out to avoid fluff on the outer surface and to avoid 'shine' by ironing, they were folded horizontally at about an hands width and taped into a rectangular 'block'. When worn, this produced inverted vertical creases down the side of the leg. In time these were accepted as the thing to have and were pressed firmly into place from the early years of the century. Since the First World War bell bottoms were purchased for tradition rather than any practical use but were replaced by flared trousers in 1977.

Jackets

Since 1859 the sailor's uniform has undergone a number of changes, perhaps the most surprising being the removal of the blue jacket, which had given rise to the nickname 'bluejacket' for a sailor, in 1890. At the same time the 'frock', which used to be tucked into the trousers, gave way to the 'jumper' which was not. CPOs and first class POs moved into fore and aft rig from 1859 onwards. In 1956 it was decided that all ratings other than artificer apprentices and Locally Entered Personnel (LEP) should be dressed as seamen and their rig changed accordingly. In 1995, trials with a female version of the square rig uniform proved extremely successful and in 1996 all female junior ratings changed into the new rig. By the end of 1997 the last LEP's will go and new square rig will be introduced to all artificer and technician apprentices.

Uniformity - At Last!

Thus, in 1977, for the first time since the Admiralty Circular of 1857, all ratings will wear the same ceremonial uniforms with the enormous benefits that this brings in terms of corporate appearance and the provision of manpower for ceremonial occasions.

Advice to after dinner speakers; If after the first ten minutes you don't strike oil, Stop Boring.

STOP PRESS:- I have recently received a letter from a Bill Parsons, Bill served on the 1954-56 commission and he would like to send greetings to the following shipmates:- Les Drummock (Cox'n), Bill Bolton (Buffer), ? Curtis, Jan Janes (Messdeck), George Hambly (G.I), and Yeoman Holdsworthy. Bill who is awaiting an hip replacement went on to complete 30 years service and finished at H.M.S. Raleigh with the title of Chief of the Seamanship School. I have loads of memories and photographs of my time on the Opossum says Bill.