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**Views and opinions expressed in the R08 are those of the contributors and unless stated are not necessarily those of the Association.**

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## **CHAIRMANS CHAT/ EDITORIAL**

With this issue we are commemorating the 50th anniversary of Centaur first commissioning. To some of you it must seem like yesterday. Thanks to everyone who sent in material it is much appreciated. Remember Albion's & Bulwarks it is your turn next year, I would like to hear from you, dits and stories particularly from the first commission please.

I am delighted to report that we have firmly cemented our association with the new Albion and would like to welcome the CO Captain Peter Hudson as our first Honory Vice President and the Reverend Michael

Meachin – Albion’s padre as our association padre. Four committee members were present at the commissioning ceremony in Devonport.

A week later fourteen members were invited onboard in Portsmouth for a tour of the ship, a full report follows. This is hopefully the first of many future visits - watch this space.

On learning that despite the subs reminders sent out with the last R08 some members were still behind with this years subs, I checked the list of outstanding names and recognised familiar names who I was sure thought they were paid up. This indeed turned out to be the case when I spoke to them and the problems were soon sorted out.

In case anyone is wondering about when their subs are due Bob has clearly laid it out in his treasurers article in this issue .

The members which our records show to be in arrears have an orange spot on their address label on the envelope. If you find you have an orange spot and wish to stay a member please contact Bob to sort it out. Those we do not hear from will be treated as resignations and this will be their last R08 as it is unfair to expect the other members to subsidise them from the funds. If you find you have a red spot and have recently paid your subs please accept my apologies there is always a time de;ay between putting this in print and mailing out, particularly with a postal strike going on at the present time.

Looking ahead to 2004/5 your committee are arranging a varied social programme including the AGM and a Social evening with ShepWooley, HMS Bulwark(1914) commemorations in Chatham, and a Trafalgar night dinner commemorating the bicentenary year in the Victory Club HMS Nelson, details of these events and others still in the pipeline will be in R08 as finalised.

As many of you know most ship associations have their own standard, towards the end of this issue there is a statement from the secretary on this subject please take a minute to read it.

As a final word remember most of the UK now has a regional rep if in any doubt of anything at all please contact them.

***A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year***

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**IN MEMORIUM**

**Frank Williams (228) passed away in 2002  
Bulwark 64-66 SBPO**

**George New (1734) passed away in May  
Bulwark 59-61 Lt Cdr**

**Doug “Paddy” Macey (1355) passed away July 26<sup>th</sup>  
Albion 60 – 61 CAA 894 Squadron**

**Roger Billingham(1369) passed away 10<sup>th</sup> September  
Bulwark 66 – 67 Cook**

**Henley Roles(1636) passed away 21<sup>st</sup> September  
Bulwark 63 – 65 AB**

**Donald Burland(1484) passed away 1<sup>st</sup> Nov  
Albion 56-58 LA(PM) 849 Squadron**

**Roy Crossley (234) passed away earlier this year  
Bulwark 57 – 58 NAM(AE)**

**R I P**

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## *SHIP to SHORE*

*Signals from the  
“Island”*

### **News News News**

#### **AGM 2004**

**The next AGM/Social coincides with the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the commissioning of HMS Bulwark & Albion and the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the inauguration of the Association in 1979.**

**All members and guests are cordially invited to attend both the AGM and our special social event in the evening on 17<sup>th</sup> April 2004.**

The AGM will be held in the Home Club at 12:00hrs.

The Anniversary Social will be held at the WO & SR Mess, HMS Nelson at 19:30hrs, dress code will be Jacket & Tie (Blazers acceptable). Shep Wooley is booked for this very special occasion.

#### **National Memorial Arboretum**

The date for the planting of a Memorial tree has been finalised as Saturday 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2004. This is a very special event for the Association and the committee are very keen for as many members and guests as possible to join us for what promises to be a memorable day. We will be combining this with a Social event before and after the ceremony over the weekend 21<sup>st</sup> – 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2004.

Jackie and I have been to have a look around and we were very impressed by the care and attention that is given to the site. I hope you

agree that it will provide a worthwhile and lasting memorial to the Association.

## **Sec Says.....**

Please take note of future Association events published elsewhere in this RO8 the most prominent being our commemorative event in Chatham in November 2004.

I apologise to those members who requested a Trafalgar Night this year; unfortunately the venues we tried were completely booked so we are going for a spectacular Trafalgar Night in 2005. (No Trafalgar Night 2004 because of our Chatham event).

## **And Finally.....**

Jackie and I wish you all a very Merry Christmas and a prosperous New Year.

Over to you.....

AR.

Yours Aye

Sec

## **Nominations for the Committee**

The following committee positions are due for re-election at AGM 2004:-

Secretary    Treasurer    Social Secretary    Editor R08

Any member that would like to stand for any of the above positions please forward your name together with your proposer to the Secretary no later than March 1<sup>st</sup> 2004.

Please note that submitted items for the AGM must be with the sec by that date aswell.

“The Association goes to Guzz.....”  
The commissioning of HMS Albion(L14)

Following a kind invitation from Captain Peter Hudson, Commanding Officer of HMS Albion to attend the commissioning of the new ship; Unfortunately our President, Sir Patrick Symons was unable to join us due to another engagement so Mike Noonan, Mike Bridges, Bob Cowan and I duly set off to take in the sights and sounds of Guzz and perhaps get a glimpse of the Torpoint ferry!

Having left Pompey at the crack of dawn, we arrived in plenty of time to book into our accommodation at the Royal Fleet Club and enjoy a full English breakfast to set us up for the day! Fully booted and spurred we set off tickets in hand to HMS Drake Drill Shed for tea and bickies prior to being bussed down to the jetty for the formal ceremony.

There were many people from the ships affiliated organisations and families of the ships company in attendance.

On arrival at the jetty we were guided to our places and ready to observe the proceedings. HMS Albion looked in splendid condition with flags and red carpet laid out for the official guest HRH The Princess Royal. We were very proud to be at this very special occasion for the new ship, some 30 years after the last Albion decommissioned. As the bands played everyone around was enjoying the atmosphere and awaiting the start of the ceremony. On cue the guard and divisions marched on and took their places, although there was a slight delay in the arrival of Princess Anne due to traffic from Exeter Airport.

The ceremony was carried out with precision and was very appropriate for the occasion and was thoroughly enjoyed by all those attending.

The commissioning cake was duly cut by Mrs Hudson and of course the most junior rating aboard, this was followed by the presentation of a painting of the new ship to HRH The Princess Royal, who then asked that the painting be held onboard the ship.

Following the ceremony we were all cordially invited to go onboard Albion to enjoy some refreshments and a couple or two wets to celebrate. We were ably assisted throughout by Lt Aidan Cowan (PWO(C)) the ships affiliation officer and by PO Paul Buckley (POSA) who had previously attended our Trafalgar Night Dinner in 2001. After enjoying the food and succeeding in RASing quite a few drinks, we settled down to accosting several ships company and senior officers for a chat including Vice Admiral Sir James Jungius CO of Albion 71-72, (he sends his best regards to his old ships' company) and Commodore Timothy Lawrence to whom we buttonholed for quite some time!

We also talked to a couple of young ratings and managed to bore them rigid with our dits, they did eventually escape to return, thankfully, with more drinks(I think to shut us up!). After the celebrations and with invitations to several messes in hand, we then repaired back to the Fleet Club before the obligatory trip down to the fleshpots of the Barbican (It's changed a lot!) to finish off the day. We all very much enjoyed our visit and looked forward to the ships visit to Pompey the next week (that's another story!).

The President and Association Committee would like to extend their grateful thanks to Captain Peter Hudson, Commander Mike Richardson, Lieutenant Aidan Cowan and POSA Paul Buckley for their time and patience in allowing the Association to be represented at the ships first commissioning.

## **Notes from the Treasurer :**

### **Annual Subscriptions**

1. The subscriptions are due of the 1<sup>st</sup> May each year.
2. They are paid in advance ; therefore the next Subs are due 1<sup>st</sup> May 2004 and are valid until 1<sup>st</sup> May 2005.
3. Over 150 members pay their Subs by Standing Order and if anyone else wishes to pay by this method, either ask me for a Lloyds form, return it with your details on it and I will hand it in at the branch I use, or set up a Standing Order at your own bank(The best method) using their forms, the destination account is ... HMS Bulwark Association, Lloyds TSB Cosham, Portsmouth.  
Sort Code 30-96-11 A.C No. 2739754.  
Use your Ships Book No. as reference.

### **Slop Room**

7 Bulwark books @ £7.00 each  
3 Albion Ties @ £6.00 each  
5 Bulwark Ties @ £6.00 each  
Nil Centaur Ties  
9 Combined Bulwark, Albion & Centaur Ties @ £6.00 each  
2 Albion Blazer Badges @ £6.00  
1 Bulwark Blazer Badge @ £6.00  
2 Centaur Blazer Badges @ £6.00  
6 Combined Bulwark Albion & Centaur (large) @ £6.00  
10 Combined Bulwark Albion & Centaur (small) @ £6.00

n.b. Please note that Bobs address is 10 Hereford Road Southsea  
PO5 2DH

*"The Membership Sec. reports that the following local areas have been set up and indeed you may well have been contacted by your rep. already. Addresses for the reps. are given below should you wish to contact them. Please give them your support.*

*John Connelly 95 Members - South West - Devon, Cornwall, Dorset, Somerset, Avon. (113 Broadmead, Callington, Cornwall, PL17 7DE).*

*Les Hitchin 52 Members - London & North Thames - Beds, Bucks, Herts, Northants, Middx, London. (66 Newtown Road, Bishops Stortford, Herts., CM23 3SD).*

*Keith Ridley 68 Members - Eastern England - Norfolk, Suffolk, Cambs, Essex, Notts, Lincs. (18 Littleworth End, Offord Darcy, St. Neots, Huntingdon, Cambs., PE18 9RA).*

*George Sexton 83 Members - Northern England - Cumbria, N'umberland, Lancs, Yorks, Co. Durham, Cleveland. (36 Oakland Glen, Carr Wood Park, Walton-le-Dale, Lancs., PR5 4LS).*

*Bob Styants 77 Members - West Midlands - Liverpool/Manchester, Cheshire, Shropshire, Staffs., Derbyshire, Birmingham, Leics., Worcs., Warks. (10 Witton Bank, Narrow Lane, Halesowen, Birmingham B62 9PL).*

***Mick Toman 15 Members - Ireland. (21 Knock Eden Close, Knock Road, Ballymoney, Co. Antrim, Northern Ireland, BT53 6UE).***

***Vacancies are available as follows should you wish to take on the task which is not intended to be particularly onerous (!):-***

***Overseas (27 members- including the Channel Islands); Scotland (36 members); Wales (20 members); Thames Valley (Oxford, Gloucester, Berks & Wilts. - 35 members); South East (Surrey, Kent, Sussex - 59 members) and finally Hants. with 99 members.***

***The above areas are not cast in the proverbial "tablets of stone" and may well be adjusted by the reps. in consultation with each other as time progresses".***

## **Historians Corner**

Thanks to the generosity of the membership, I now hold the complete set of Albion's Commissioning Books which we have had copied and presented to Captain Peter Hudson on the occasion of the Ship's first visit to Portsmouth.

We would obviously wish to make the same presentation to the new Bulwark when she finally comes into service, hopefully by the end of next year. To achieve this, I am still looking for the 1972-74 Commissioning Book and that for 1979-81 final Commission.

If any member has either of these books in their possession and would care to lend me them for copying, I would be very grateful indeed and would of course return them.

I am also looking for the First Commission book for HMS Centaur, 1953-1956, to complete the whole sets for the Association Archives.

I would like to record my thanks to Ned Parkinson for the fantastic amount of archive material he has passed on to me, mainly regarding Bulwark. This has included the original deck plans of the Bulwark which will go the new ship eventually (we have copies), personal reports by Captain Villiers on the ship's operations in the 50's and scores of photographs of Bulwark and much more. Thank you Ned, if I receive much more, I will probably have to move house! We now have a unique record of this ship from her launch through to her final days at Cairnryan.

We now have a Regional Rep for the Scottish Area, I am pleased to report that Denis Askham has offered to take over this region and he has kindly consented to allow me to give his address and E-mail number should any member wish to contact him:

'Bryden', Boyndie, Banff, Aberdeenshire AB45 2LD is the address and DnsAskhm@aol.com is the e-mail. You may well have seen his details in the website as he and his wife Mary run an excellent B&B establishment with magnificent views over the Moray Firth.

Following a visit to Chatham on the 1st of November, I should be able to update the information on the 90th Commemoration of the loss of the fifth Bulwark in November 1914. This will appear in the Spring edition of the RO8 I will also pass this information to the Regional Reps together with other planned projects in order that they may be able to raise some local interest from their areas. I will also place this on the website.

Does anyone have any information of Albion's Bell which was used for christening services during her Commissions? I have had a request from a lady who was one of the very last babies to have been christened using this bell before Albion went out of service, to let her know of it's location, as her name would have been engraved on the bell. Any information will be gratefully received and passed on.

Finally Malta. I am pleased to report that this trip is now sold out and would express my thanks for the support. Should anyone still wish to go, please give me your names and contact numbers and I will put you on a standby list in the event of any cancellations prior to the departure in April 2005.

Have a great Festive Season,

Mike Bridges (02392 386866 or MikeB6024@aol.com

## Yours letters

From Les Hutchins (1791)

“At the last AGM members were asked if they wanted a social evening, a lot of hands went up. The sec said he would organise it.

I travelled 140 miles as did two other members to the Victory Guides Mess for the social.

I was very disappointed in the turnout of members, where were the locals ???. I felt sorry for the officers who organised the evening.

“YOU MISSED A FREE TOT ”

**Don't forget next AGM social HMS Nelson Senior Rates Mess Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> April Shep Wooley cabaret then dancing to Ritz (excellent duo).**

## **CENTAUR 50<sup>th</sup> or 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary ??**

Whilst we are commemorating the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Centaur first commissioning on **17<sup>th</sup> September 1953** the contract to build the ship was actually placed with Harland & Wolf on **12<sup>th</sup> July 1943** although construction did not start until 1944. With the end of WWII in 1945 warship building was placed on a back burner whilst merchant ships took priority. It was not until 1947 that she was launched and that was mainly to clear the slipway for merchant shipbuilding which had a high priority in post war reconstruction.

Centaur was launched on 22<sup>nd</sup> April 1947 and named by The Duchess of Kent.

Along with her sisters Albion and Bulwark the hull was towed to a lay up berth .

With advances in naval aviation and the increase in defence spending brought on by both the Korean war and advent of the cold war, all three carriers were completed.

Centaur being the first, Albion and Bulwark following some months later.

As those on the first commission will remember Centaur was completed with a straight or axial deck, the angled deck then being a new innovation. Whilst her sisters were fitted with their angled (5 1/2 degs) at the shipbuilders, Centaur commissioned and carried out her sea trials entering Portsmouth for the first time on 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1953. Apart from some sea trials the ship remained alongside for six months whilst the angled deck was fitted and catapult trials were carried out.

The first aircraft to land onboard, a Dragonfly helicopter landed whilst the ship was anchored in St Helens Road on 29 April 1954. The first fixed wing aircraft, an Avenger was loaded onboard from an Air Lighter whilst the ship was anchored in Spithead. The next day the aircraft was launched, interestingly the pilot was Captain Sears the ships CO. Flight deck trials continued, a Sea Fury crashing on landing that first afternoon. The first jets - Sea Hawks from RNAS Ford landed on the next day. *(I have been unable to determine the squadrons involved does anyone know ??..ed)*



From Ron Edwards (1522)

“ I joined Centaur as a shipwright 3<sup>rd</sup> class at Harland & Wolf shipyard in Belfast 29<sup>th</sup> August 1953 and left the ship on 8<sup>th</sup> November 1955. We were billeted with families ashore until the accommodation onboard became available shortly before the ship left Belfast on sea trials.

I seem to recollect that the ferry Princess Victoria sank in the Irish Sea shortly before we joined the ship. I cannot remember whether anyone drafted to Centaur was involved in the sinking.

Of non FAA personnel it was said that once you had served on a carrier more will follow. Having spent two years in a mess directly under the port catapult and experienced dawn to dusk flying operations, I decided not to risk further carriers and left the service after twelve years. I was also influenced by the fact that at the time I was a smoker and did not take favourably to the long periods of smoking bans whilst aircraft were being refuelled”

Ron also remembers that on arrival in Pompey from her first foreign deployment – 7 June 1955 – quite a few of the ships company brought back canaries and other song birds. Whilst queueing to check them through customs a pipe came over the tannoy “Flight Lt Parrot report to the gangway”. Which caused much hilarity.

*Both Ron and Chas Atkinson(1255) sent me details of a spectacular incident during the first commission.as follows:-*

### **Over the Side.**

Centaur was landing on two flights of 803 squadron Seahawks in the Moray Firth whilst on passage to Northern Norway for Autumn exercises. The first flight had landed and were ranged on the starboard forward part of the flight deck. The leader of the second flight landed on and cleared the landing area in the normal manner by opening up to full throttle to get the aircraft going. When he throttled back the engine kept on winding up.

With smoking tyres from full application of the brakes the aircraft ploughed into the deck park slewing the first aircraft with the pilot still in it over the side. (The pilot was rescued by the SAR helo as the aircraft cleared the ships stern). Hitting the next aircraft a number of personnel were knocked over the side including the squadron electrical officer. Fortunately all were safely recovered although the SEO needed convalescence.



## **Memories of Centaur First Commission beyond Suez from Les Hutchins (1791)**

I joined the ship in November 1955 as an AH3. We sailed on January 10<sup>th</sup> 1956. I remember that it was a very rough passage to Gib, but the seas calmed down as we trained up between Gib and Malta. A Seahawk took off and crashed into the sea, nothing was found.

Whilst we were tied up in Karachi we had an open day for the cities residents. Owing to the hundreds waiting to view the ship, the police were called in to repel boarders. The police had long canes with brass ends and were hitting out people.

Our next fatal casualty was whilst we were on exercise off Singapore, when the arrester cable snapped and killed the arrester gear operator.

He was buried at sea. This is not mentioned in the Centaur book by Neil Mc Cart.

One Sunday a loud bang was heard and we later learnt that a PO had a nasty wound to his left upper arm from a shell left in a cannon.

The First Sea Lord, Admiral Lord Mountbatten visited us in Singapore. On a good note we did hold a crossing the line ceremony, and played deck hockey with the Albion ships company who hopped over by chopper.

We also lost two aircraft on exercise off Hong Kong.

Our Captain was H.C. Rolfe.

### **It Shouldn't Happen to a Young Sailor**

By Colin Taylor (68)

As a boy on Montclare (Sub Depot Ship) in the early 1950s I was helping load casks of neat rum when one dropped and broke open. Two ABs immediately fell on their knees and started scooping up and drinking the rum which was mixed up with fag ends, matches and oil.

As a 16 year old non drinker I was quite shocked.

The rum took effect later and they were running around the messdeck drunk as a "sailor". They both ended up in DQs.

# HMS CENTAUR ASSOCIATION

Peter Ames (649)

I have many fond memories of the time I spent on Centaur. I joined in June 1963 for the fourth commission as a young OD Stoker. In 1986 I decided to try and form an association. I had articles in various newspapers, in Navy News, and I wrote to every local radio station in the country and gave interviews on some of those stations.

As a result of the feedback the inaugural meeting for the Centaur association was held on the 21<sup>st</sup> March 1987 at the Portsmouth Home Club. RADM John Steiner the skipper on the fourth commission was in attendance and was elected the Association's President.

During the following twelve months the committee worked hard to make the association as active as possible and the membership grew.

Much help was given by Ned Parkinson, who was very active within the Bulwark association. Joint socials were organised in conjunction with Bulwark.

There were problems in view of the geographical local of members, I am based in Cornwall, our committee meetings were held in Portsmouth and the membership generally lived throughout the country. Newsletters were produced on a regular basis, but come January 1991 I had been concerned as to how the long term future of the Association could be assured, this had been made very difficult with insufficient input from members.

It was therefore agreed that there would be a "coming together" of both Bulwark and Centaur Associations.

With our geographical split of membership it was impossible for us to meet on a regular basis, whereas the Bulwark Association had a much larger membership, many in the Portsmouth area and as such their committee was able to meet on a regular basis.

Subsequently the Albion Association joined the Bulwark/Centaur to form what we have today as the one Association for the three ships. *For the benefit of our more recent members Ned Parkinson was the Sec/Treasurer/Editor R08 of our association for the first 20 years. Ned served on both Centaur and Bulwark.*

*Peter has also sent in the following information that he received at the time*

“It is with great regret that I have to inform you of the death on 27 December 1998 aged 82 of Rear Admiral O H M St.Steiner, CB signed

A.St.John Steiner OBE Commander RN.”

*On receipt of the above Peter sent Mrs Steiner his condolences on behalf of Centaur association , he received the following reply :-*

“Thank you for your kind letter on behalf of HMS Centaur Association. It is very heart warming for me to know that my husband is so well remembered and especially for his gift of laughter and his quick wit. He had an interesting and varied career both in the Royal Navy and after he retired but I think one of the happiest periods of his life was when he commanded HMS Centaur, he always spoke of her with such affection and pride.

Yours truly

Eleanor Steiner”

## **HMS ALBION FIRST POMPEY VISIT**

On 27<sup>th</sup> June members gathered on the Round Tower at the entrance to Pompey harbour to witness the new Albions first entry into Pompey. She could be seen in Spithead in company with RFA Argus. Shortly after the ship entered harbour accompanied by tug escort and a sea king taking photos. Once passed we all dived into cars and shot off into the dockyard to find her securing to her berth at North West Wall.

As it was high tide and the gangway was rigged to the main deck it was quite a climb to get onboard, dare I say that some of us felt our age.

Coming down the gangway was our good friend Lt Cdr Duncan Fogg from Bulwark, no doubt he had been getting ideas for his own ship.

Once onboard we were greeted by our liaison officer Lt Aiden Cowan and the padre Mike Meachin our new Association chaplain. This was Mikes introduction to us as he had only just accepted the job. Aiden is

the ships PWO(C), the closest most of us would recognise was the SCO or Ships Communications Officer. I was reassured when later on Aiden told me he had been a killick sparker on the Penelope at one stage of his career.

We were shown into one of the briefing rooms for tea and biscuits. Aiden then gave us a very good presentation on the ships construction, role, statistics etc. Captain Peter Hudson then came in and welcomed us onboard. As Chairman I presented Peter with a certificate making him our first ever Vice President. In return Peter presented me on behalf of the Association with a framed print of the ship. The actual painting was presented to HRH Princess Anne at the commissioning ceremony. It is intended to have the picture on display at our AGMs, formal dinners etc where it can be appreciated by the membership.

John Truscott then presented Peter with a copy of the hardback book of “our” Albion, followed by Mike Bridges presenting him with a compilation of all the commissioning books from the previous ship. Keith Ridley then made a presentation from the 62-64 commission. Presentations over Captain Hudson showed us his bridge it was very obvious how proud and delighted he is to command such a ship.

For most of us the first surprise of the day was to find the bridge carpeted, probably the lack of bridge wings were the next surprise, particularly to those of us used to open bridges. A joystick and no wheel or wheelhouse was another surprise. The bridge is about double the size of our carriers compass platforms.

This was also the opportunity for the cameras to come out.

Aiden then took us on an extensive tour of the ship, I do not think we left anything out by the time we collapsed in chairs back in the briefing room. Points that I particularly noticed:- the large flight deck, four spots so that up to four large helicopters can be accommodated at one time. Large open spaces on superstructure ideal for bronzing in foreign waters.

The landing craft dock and vehicle stowage area, is much bigger than Fearless and the new mark 10 landing craft open at both ends so that vehicles drive through the first one onto the after LCM saving time with

loading up. The operations room is another vast area, larger than the Invincible class and to a humble layman it looked much more hi tech. It was immediately obvious that if you are not in the computer world this is not for you, computers were everywhere. The RPs have lost their backwards writing boards not a chinagraph pencil was to be seen. Stokers among us could not believe they were in the MCR, as the ship is diesel electric there was no noise and it was so clean and no smell of dieso.

Accommodation areas were carpeted, with 12 man cabins instead of messdecks for junior rates.

As many will remember embarked forces mostly slept in the hanger on camp beds, not any more there are now dedicated messes for a full commando. Probably one of the most reassuring sights was the galley, the chefs still wear the same rig, and they were making oggies, unfortunately there was no time to try one.

The lady doc made us welcome in the sick bay and patiently answered a variety of questions from us geriatrics.

Finally it was time to say our farewells and thanks to both Aiden and Mike for being such excellent hosts.

Unfortunately we did not have time to visit one of messes so unable to report if they still dispense CSB – maybe next time.

### **On 848 Squadron 1959-60 - Can you Help ?**

"WORTHY DOWN, near Winchester. I would be interested to hear from anyone from 848 Squadron who served at Worthy Down between September, 1959 and March, 1960 working up with Whirlwinds prior to embarking on HMS "Bulwark".

I am researching the history of the aerodrome for the period 1917 to 1960 and the time of 848's working up was almost certainly the end of the Fleet Air Arm's use of the Station before being handed over to the Army.

I can be contacted on Winchester (01962) 881874 or via e-mail on [tdowland@compuserve.com](mailto:tdowland@compuserve.com)

All correspondence will be answered. Thank you Tony Downland "

# **THE MELIKA INCIDENT**

## **Part II**

**By**

**Mike Bridges**

At 1250 St Brides Bay picked up a stationary contact on radar and although it was some fifty miles from the position of the reported collision, it suggested that it was one of the ships involved. This proved to be correct and the ship was actually the Fernand Gilabert a tanker of 10,000 tons. She looked in a pretty bad way with a fire still raging in the bridge superstructure and the ship was blackened from the smoke. Her bows were cut back below the waterline for about 40 feet where she had ridden over the low decks of the fully laden Melika.

At the time of their arrival, they spotted a helicopter from Bulwark transferring men on to the forward part of the ship. The Fernand Gilabert was lying beam on to the sea and drifting. The Captain of the St Brides Bay decided to try and put more men onboard the stricken tanker to assist in fighting the fire and to haul in the towing gear when it was passed. Weather conditions by this time were not good and the helicopters had to return to Bulwark. Their only hope was to chance the sea boat and with a Lieutenant in charge of the sea boat crew, they attempted to get their boarding party led by Sub- Lieutenant Rogers with five ratings, a walkie talkie and fire fighting equipment onboard the Fernand Gilabert. This was going to be a difficult task as there was no visible ladder on the lee side of the ship.

There was a rope ladder hanging from the stern of the tanker but with the heavy seas it was nigh on impossible to secure the seaboat to the ladder. Sub- Lieutenant Rogers dived into the water with a line from the seaboat and swam the few yards to the ladder. This was an extremely dangerous task but he secured the line and pulled the boat alongside the ladder allowing his men to board the ship and tow the boat along the lee side of the Fernand Gilabert and haul their equipment onboard using heaving lines.

With some difficulty, the St Brides Bay closed on the tanker to recover the seaboard and it was decided that the remaining fire-fighting gear consisting of a portable pump, clothing and an aldis lamp would be passed over by line. With the difficulty of holding the frigate in position, the job was not completed until 1700. The fire onboard the tanker was by now under control and preparations were made to take the Fernand Gilabert in tow.

Several unsuccessful attempts were made to get the tow line across to the tanker which resulted in the loss of 80 fathoms of manila which also had the light jackstay gear attached. With the weather worsening and the light fading, the Captain of the St Brides Bay decided that the only sure way of accomplishing their task would be to attempt to put his ship alongside the tanker.

This was going to be a dangerous manoeuvre and proved so when during the final stages of coming alongside, both ships yawed towards each other resulting in damage to the frigates bows. Once the headrope had been passed over, the two ships laid alongside each other giving three more ratings the chance to board the tanker. More damage was done to the superstructure of St Brides Bay when the ships rolled towards each other, this re-occurred before the tow rope was passed over and the ships drifted apart.

It had been decided to tow the Fernand Gilabert stern first due to the damaged bow section, which would have made it extremely dangerous to tow her ahead. When eventually all was secure, the tow was commenced at 1800 by which time the ships had drifted to within 36 miles of Ras Al Hadd and no repair facilities would be available in that direction. Instead, they would attempt to head for the safer waters of the Gulf of Oman where a more permanent tow could be passed and more hands transferred to the tanker.

The frigate, HMS Loch Killisport, had by this time arrived in the area and was standing by to assist and to be ready to take the tanker in tow should St Brides Bay lose it. Further difficulties were encountered during the evening when the tanker drifted off to port pulling her bows round to starboard.

The sailors onboard the tanker made efforts to put her rudder over to counteract this and the tow slowly continued.

At 0250 on Sunday 14<sup>th</sup>, the tow parted and for the remainder of the night the tanker drifted with the two frigates standing by. Short of the unlikely arrival of an ocean going tug or, until the weather abated, the best chance left was to attempt to get the Fernand Gilabert's engines working. The salvage crew reported that this could be possible with more technical ratings onboard.

A signal was sent to Bulwark requesting a helicopter to transfer men from the frigate and on its arrival, at 1630 a party of 1 ERA, 1 POME, 1 ME and 1 LME were transferred with their tool kits from St Brides Bay to the tanker. At 0730 Monday 15<sup>th</sup> of September, the St Brides Bay set course to join up with Bulwark leaving the Loch Killisport favourably placed to pass a tow once the weather allowed.

Meanwhile, back onboard Bulwark reports had been received that after the collision, Melika, although abandoned, had continued to steam south. When last seen at about 0600 on the 13<sup>th</sup>, she was reported stopped and on fire. At 1400 a Skyraider from Bulwark found the Melika in a position some 25 miles to the south of Bulwark still on fire and listing over. The Carrier continued south until she reached the Melika, which was ablaze midships.

A salvage party under the command of Lieutenant Commander P.P.R. Dane RN, was lowered onto the 20,000 ton Melika which was heavily laden with oil, from helicopters from 845 Squadron. First onboard was Lieutenant D.P. Weil, Royal Australian Navy, of Brisbane. Another member of the boarding party, was REM(A) Ron Syrad. He had been flown over to set up a VHF radio link, as Melika had no power.

Ron recalled climbing down the rope ladder from the helicopter from about 30 feet with his toolbag on his arm. The radio and batteries were lowered down by rope. "I set up my gear for the 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant on the starboard forward wing (I think his semaphore was a bit shaky). Having shown him how it all worked I was then involved in hauling massive tow-lines around. It was dirty black burnt oil everywhere, a huge list to port and no water to wash with. There was only beer, 90,000 bottles of it, so we had to wash with the stuff. You had to drink at least 10 pints a day or you would dehydrate, what else is a thirsty matelot to do!"

Ron further recalled helping to carry ‘Plumb’ Lamb, a short stocky man with a beard and built like a ‘proverbial brick chicken house’ from the aft refrigeration space where he had nearly died from gas leaking from the fridges “no smell, no taste –lethal” .... continued

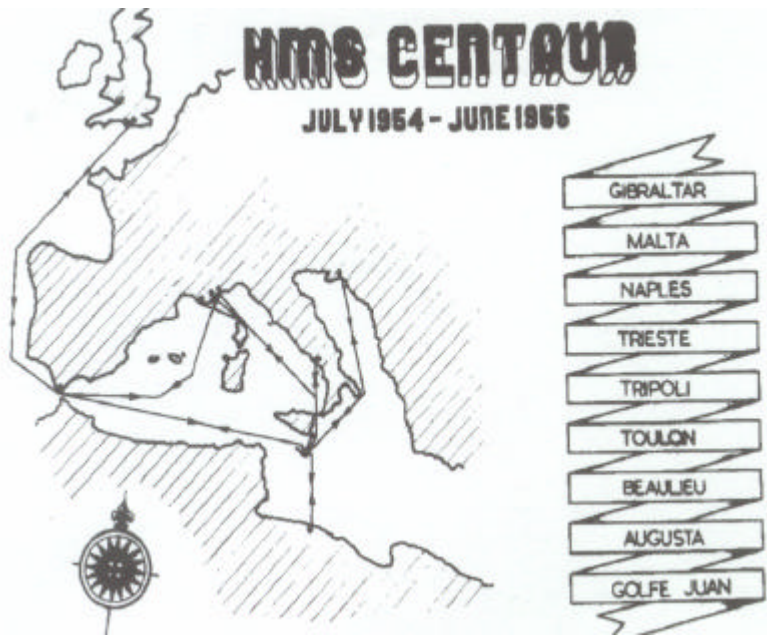


## **Navy News**

**Back copies of the Navy News 1956-2000 are held at the British National Newspaper Library Colindale Avenue London N9 5HE, 020 7412 7353.**

**ID is required for entry.**

*Sent in by Colin Taylor (208)*



The First Commission saw Centaur busy in the Med. In October 1954 she joined up with Albion for the first time, the ships exercised together through until December.

The ship also evacuated the last British troops to leave Trieste.

On a ceremonial note the ship also joined twenty other units of the Med Fleet in exercises in honour of Emperor Heile Selassi of Ethopia. At one stage this involved a “grid iron” in which two lines of ships steaming parallel turn inwards towards each other and cross their bows, understandably Centaur did not join in that particular manoeuvre.

## NAAFI CLUBS

To the matelot of the postwar navy right up to the 1970s few if any of us did not at one time or another use the Port division NAAFI clubs. Amazingly all three buildings survived right up until a few months ago although long since ceasing to be services clubs.

In Portsmouth the club opposite what was Duchess of Kent Wrens barracks has until recently been the watering hole of the students union of Portsmouth University. Sadly due to a new building opening up close to the “Mucky Duck” in Commercial Road the old club has been demolished in the last few months.

Better news from Chatham, the club albeit with some new building added on, now rejoices as the King Charles Hotel. Press cuttings and some pictures of the old days are displayed in the foyer. Due to the demise of Chatham this club was only open for fourteen years , 1948 - 1962

The large club in Guzz just down from the Hoe is also being used by students and hopefully will continue to do so for the foreseeable future, as it is a reminder of younger days and a convenient watering hole between the Barbican and Union Street.

*If this triggers off memories why not share them with us, just send them to me your editor and I will do the rest.*

### **Royal Naval Old Comrades(RNOC) Club Eastbourne**

Whilst on the subject of clubs I have received a letter from the secretary of the above club offering a warm welcome to any member that happens to be in the area. The address is :-

16 Beach Road Eastbourne, which is off the eastern end of the seafront. Normal opening hours apply. Phone number 01323 731276.

## DOWN THE GUT

Remember the good old days ? Bobby, Cookie, Sugar and Sparrow ? Take a trip down memory lane and relive those heady days of your youth.

Read what some of your mates remember, the hectic runs ashore, making do during dummy week. Scrounging a collar, lanyard or even a pair of shoes.

How did we ever manage to get away with it ? Strutting along Sliema front like we owned the place, knowing we had, not two pennies to rub together.

You remember the bars of course – Tony's, The Great War, The Blue Heaven, The Robin Hood, New Life, Lucky Wheel, Silver Horse, Bing Crosby to mention few.

The rest camps at Qrendi and Ghain Tuffieha. And we still drew our tot there.

Tea in a glass, savoury cheesecakes, steak sandwiches, fresh bread rolls and the many eating houses.

The Splendid, Ben Marle, Magnet, Chez Jims and the Lantern.

The lodging houses, Yorkies, the Rest in Heaven, the Central all down the Gut and the Cock and Bottle in Sliema.

The dghaises and gharries and those rickety buses with more ticket inspectors than passengers, and the end of the ride there was'nt much left of the ticket.

All this and much more can be found in my e-book available at the nominal sum of £3 from [www.deunantbooks.com](http://www.deunantbooks.com)

You will not be disappointed I promise, so lash out and enjoy a good read.

Cheers,  
Bill Campbell

## **PORTSMOUTH 2005**

A long way off I know but as a final thought the following is an outline of the Trafalgar Bicentenary commemorations.

If you are considering coming down for any of it I would suggest book early.

### **June**

**Tue 28<sup>th</sup> Fleet Review Spithead & Son et Lumiere**

**Wed 29<sup>th</sup> Drumhead Service – Southsea Common**

**Thur 30<sup>th</sup>–**

**Festival of the Sea (largest gathering**

**Sun 3 Jul**

**of ships so far)**

**The Home Club bargain breaks will be available. i.e.  
3 nights B&B + 3 course dinner £94 at 2005 prices.  
Optional extra nights will be about £34/£35 per night.**

**Entrance fee to IFOS will be approx £15.00 per day  
From 1000 to midnight. There is talk of a reduced rate for  
veterans on the first day, will confirm that when known.**

**If we have enough numbers to form a group it may be  
possible to arrange a boat trip to witness the Royal  
review of the fleet and a social evening.**

**News updates for this great event as and when known.**

## **LATE NEWS**

### **A Standard for the Association**

**"In commemoration of the 25th anniversary of the Association and the 50th anniversary of the commissioning of our ships we intend to commission an "Association Standard" to celebrate these events. The Standard would be in a contemporary style and cost in the region of £1000 including all accessories required. The design would include the white ensign in top left corner combined ops badge in bottom right corner, Association badge in the centre with the name running above and below it . The colour of the standard would be navy blue.**

**It is intended for the standard to be available for funerals, parades etc as and when requested by members.**

**As many members will know most Associations already have their own standards and we are one of the few of the larger ship Associations not to have a standard.**

**Any member with any objection to the purchase of an Assoc. Standard should contact the Secretary in writing or by e-mail only without delay. All objections should be received by 31st Dec 2003."**

## LATE LATE NEWS

' The Association has recently been making advance arrangements for the 90th Commemoration of the loss of HMS Bulwark in 1914 in the River Medway. The proceedings will be based at the King Charles Hotel in Gillingham between Friday 26th November and Sunday 28th of November 2004. There will be ceremonies on Saturday 27th of wreath laying over the wreck site in the Medway in the morning, followed by further wreaths being laid at the Sheerness War Memorial and a Service later that same day.

On Sunday 28th, we will visit the Woodlands Naval Cemetery in Gillingham to lay wreaths at the mass grave and individual graves of Bulwarks crew members who were recovered, and again, a service will be held.

Members of at least two Sea Cadet Corps will parade on both days and Standards will be paraded. The Mayors of Swale & Medway respectively, have been invited to participate and we will be inviting representatives of the new HMS Bulwark to attend.

The King Charles Hotel has arranged a number of 'Special Packages' giving 3,2 or 1 night stays at the Hotel to include a formal Commemoration Dinner to be held on Saturday 27th November 2004. There is also provision for Members living locally, or those arranging their own accommodation, to attend the Dinner.

There is already, quite a lot of local interest being shown and there will be Press coverage. We would welcome a large turnout by our Members for this important historical occasion and partners will be welcome.

For full details of the hotel packages and the Commemoration, please contact me, Mike Bridges as soon as possible: Tel: 02392 386866, or E.mail: MikeB6024@aol.com or by post to, 12 Froxfield Gardens, Portchester, Fareham, Hants. PO16 8DN

Please come along and support this major event in our Association's history, we look forward to having you with us.

Mike Bridges