

MARITIMEQUEST

The following manuscript was written by Jim I. Gallie who served in HMS Victorious from Mar. 29, 1941 to Sept. 12, 1945. Some was written from memory and some was taken from various published sources. Jim posted this manuscript and other material to MaritimeQuest from his home in New Zealand on Jan. 10, 2013. He tragically passed away only six days later on Jan. 16, before the package had arrived in Dallas, Texas. Out of respect for Jim it is my decision to publish the manuscript "as is" without making any edits or corrections. The reader should keep in mind that some dates may be incorrect and that there are spelling and other errors in the manuscript. This was Jim's tribute to his ship and the men he served with and I don't feel that I should interfere with the text.

Michael W. Pocock
Webmaster

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H.M.S. VICTORIOUS 1941-1945

29 March 1941 Commissioned Victorious in Newcastle where she was built. Left for Scapa Flow on 15 April, flying on 1 squadron of Swordfish on the way. 17 April-8 May Exercises, and yet more exercises. Flew on 2 more squadrons of Swordfish, and 1 of Fulmars.

Did speed trails, registering a top speed of 36.2 knots, against an estimated top speed of 31 knots.

9 May-18 May From Scapa to Gourock, flying off 2 squadrons, 1 of Fulmar, 1 of Swordfish, on the way. Took on a load of dismantled Hurricanes for Malta, but before we could leave for the Mediterranean word came through that the Bismark was loose in northern waters.

18 May-27 May

Battleships King George V (AD. Tovey)

Carriers Victorious

Cruisers Galetea (R.Ad. Curtis), Aurora, Kenya, Hermoine.

Destroyers Active, Punjabi, Nestor, Inglefield, Intrepid, Lance.

Op. Bismark. Victorious, Inglefield, Intrepid, and Lance left Gourock, and proceeded at high speed to meet the rest of the force from Scapa. Struck a force 10 miles to the north of Scotland, which so badly damaged Lance that she had to limp back to port. Only 9 Torpedo Bombers were available on Victorious, as the hangar was full of Hurricanes. The 9, led by LT.Cdr. Esmonde, made 1 attack on the Bismark, registering 1 hit, not a major one, but, as we found out later from German records, enough to slow her a little. After the action, Victorious and Hermoine returned to Gourock to complete loading.

3 June-11 June

Carriers Victorious

Cruisers Hermoine

Destroyers 3

,While on passage from Gourock to Gibraltar, aircraft from the Victorious sighted the German patrol ship Gonzenheim, and alerted Nelson and Neptune who were just north of the Azores. The Gonzenheim scuttled itself, rather than face them. After rendezvousing with Force H, arrived in Gibraltar on 11 June.

13 June-15 June

Bat-Cruiser Renown

Carriers Ark Royal (R.Ad. Somerville) Victorious

Destroyers 6

OP. Tracer. 47 Hurricanes were assembled, ranged, and flown off to Malta from a position south of the Balearic Islands. Led by 4 Hudson bombers, 43 reached Malta on 14 June.

22 July-4 August

Carriers Victorious (R.Ad. Wake-Walker) Furious

Cruisers Devonshire, Suffolk

Destroyers Echo, Eclipse, Escapade, Intrepid

Raids on Kirkenes and Petsamo. 30 July 20 Albacores and 9 Fulmars attack the German gunnery training ship Bremse, and other ships in Kirkenes. 11 Albacores and 2 Fulmars were shot down by A.A fire and German fighters, with no severe damage done to the ships. At the same time 18 Albacores, 6 Fulmars, and 4 Hurricanes take off from Furious, to attack shipping in Petsamo. There being no ships in the harbour, the force attacked land targets. 1 Albacore and 1 Fulmar were lost to A.A. fire. No German fighters were encountered.

19 August— 10 September —
Carriers Victorious (R.Ad. Wake—Walker) Argus
Cruisers Devonshire, Suffolk
Destroyers 6

Op. Dervish. First convoy to Archangel. Left Hvalfjord, Iceland, on my 17th birthday 21 Aug. 1941. It consisted of 7 merchant ships. No enemy action was encountered, and the ships arrived in Archangel on 31 Aug. Argus is detached with escort of 6 destroyers to fly off 24 Hurricanes of the 151 fighter wing, to be stationed at Vaenga, near Murmansk. After calling in to Spitzbergen to refuel the destroyers, Victorious's aircraft made attacks, on the 3rd and 7th Sept., on shipping in the Tromso area, but with little success. The force reached Scapa on 10th Sept.

11 September—27 September 1941

Carrier Victorious
Rosyth Dry Dock
Maintenance, and fitting of De Gaussing loops (anti-Magnetic mine devices,) 5 days leave each watch.
With 24-26 hr train journeys each way, it was hardly worth going home.

29 September— 8 October

Carriers Victorious (R.Ad. Wake—Walker)
Cruisers Devonshire, Suffolk
Destroyers 6
Convoy P.Q.I

This was the start of the PQ convoys, mainly from Iceland to Murmansk. At this time of the year there was about 7 hours daylight, but dense sea fog was quite common, and often our only contact with the vessel ahead was their fog buoy. This was like a small boat shaped float with high flaring bows which was towed on the end of a 5 to 10 hundred yard cable, depending on the separation required. As the buoy cut through the water it sent up fans of water either side of its bow. It was the job of a lookout on the forepeak of the ship, in constant communication with the bridge to keep them informed of the buoy's position relative to the ship.

The convoy of 14 Merchant ships, capable of 9 knots or better, with the convoy restricted to the speed of the slowest ship, had a close escort of 1 AA cruiser, and 12 sloops, corvettes, and ex deep sea trawler, converted as anti-submarine vessels. Their job was to surround the convoy and provide anti-aircraft and/or anti-submarine defence as required. Each merchant vessel also carried some defence, usually an antique 4.5 gun, and some depth charges on a track over the stern. These depth charges were set deep, mainly designed to scare the submarine rather than to do any damage, as the ships did not have the speed to get away from the explosion, as the faster Naval vessels did.

The Carrier escort's job was to hang back about 1 hundred miles as a buffer in case any of the larger German ships decided to have a go. At the same time our aircraft, armed with depth charges flew patrols just astern of the convoy, and providing early warning to the close escort.

This convoy got through with no losses, but a few scares from submarine contacts by the close escort. One of Victorious's Swordfish sighted a submarine on the surface, and released its load of depth charges on it as it dived, but there was no sign of it suffering any damage.

On the way back to Iceland we carried out air attack on some of the small vessels the Germans used for transport along the Norwegian coast.

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8 October— 11 October 1941

Battleship King George V (Ad. Tovey) (Think he wanted to give KGV a run, it was the first time it had been off it's moorings since the Bismark action.)

Cruisers Devonshire, Suffolk, Aurora

Destroyers 6

PQ1 rear escort joined forces with KGV and her escort off the coast of southern Norway for raids on any shipping that was available. Pickings were slim, but Victorious's aircraft managed to sink 2 small steamers in the Vestfjord area, while KGV stood guard in case any of the big boys came out.

November— 5 November 1941

Battleship King George V (Ad. Tovey)

Carrier Victorious

Cruisers Devonshire, Suffolk, Aurora, Kenya, Hermoine

Destroyers 6

Deployed south of Iceland to cover reported breakout from Norway in to the north Atlantic, of the Tirpitz, and/or the Admiral Scheer from the Baltic. In fact, the Ad. Scheer had machinery trouble, and the Tirpitz's trip was vetoed by the German High Command, because they knew there was a carrier force in the area.

14 November— 3 January (approx) 1942

Return to Rosyth for dry docking and repairs. 10 days leave each watch.

Several modifications carried out, including fitting the latest (at that time)

R.D.F. gear to be known; once the Americans came into the war; as Radar. I believe they claimed to have invented it.

While in dock, the boys division did 4 Funeral Firing party details The cemetery being 5 miles away,, we got plenty of exercise with the march there and back.

One of the funerals was for a Leading Stoker who came back from shore leave somewhat the worse for wear, and missed the gangway which ran from the dockside to our flight deck, and finished up in the bottom of the dry dock 60 feet below. I never knew who the others were.

While I was there, I made contact with an uncle (one of my Mother's brothers) and some cousins, one of whom took me to a Highland Dance, telling me it was fun. It took me a week to recover. They lived in a small town named Kirkcaldy, a short distance from Rosyth, but as far as the language was concerned it could have been in the wilds of Africa. I don't think I understood more than 10 words while I was with them. The name of the town where they lived, was, as they pronounced it "Kucudie". But they made me very welcome, and I enjoyed the visit. I learned later that even people from Edinburgh couldn't understand them, so I didn't feel too bad. They probably found my Welsh accent, which was still at that time pretty thick, hard to follow.

4 January---20 February 1942

Carrier Victorious

Cruisers Various

Destroyers Various

Exercises from Scapa, AA shoots, Paravane streaming and recovery (mine sweeping equipment) Manoeuvres with screen destroyers and stern guard cruisers. Training new squadrons. Out from Scapa about 0700. Returning about 1700 every day for the best part of 2 months.

15 February--- 23 February 1942

Battleship KGV (Ad. Tovey)

Carrier Victorious

Cruiser Berwick

Destroyers 4

A sweep of the Tromso area, to attack any shipping that was available, but we were diverted to cut off a German naval force consisting of the Admiral Scheer, Prince Eugen, and 4 destroyers, reported to have left Brunsbuttelkoog in an attempt to get up the Norwegian coast, possibly hoping to get as far as Trondhiem. In very heavy weather, 3 of the German destroyers are forced to return, and the 2 forces fail to make contact, but HM Submarine Trident sighted Prince Eugen, and loses 4 torpedoes, 1 of which takes off her fantail and rudders, putting her out of action for the next 6 months. 50 people died, some of whom were Todt Organisation workers being transported to do forced labour.

24 February--- 1 March 1942

Restocking at Scapa, and a couple of day runs, exercising and flying practice.

2 March---13 March 1942

Battleship King George V (Ad Tovey)

Carrier Victorious

Destroyers Onslow, Ashanti, Intrepid, Icurus, Lookout, Beduin.

Rear cover for convoy.

Battleship Duke of York (V.Ad. Curtis)

B/Cruiser Renown

Cruiser Kenya

Destroyers Faulkner, Eskimo, Punjabi, Fury, Echo, Eclipse.

Home Fleet covering from the top of the North sea up the Norwegian coast.

Convoy PQ 12 (North bound) 16 ships, from Reykjavik

Convoy QP 8 (South bound) 15 ships, from Kola inlet.

The convoy was barely on its way, when intelligence reports from Admiralty advise that Tirpitz and 5 destroyers have left Trondheim to intercept them..

Leaving Kenya to join the convoy's close cover, the 2 British forces combine.

In poor visibility they fail to find Tirpitz, and she in turn fails to find the convoys.

who carry on to have a relatively good passage with only one loss from QP 8.

Victorious, Faulkner, Eskimo, Beduin, and Intrepid were detached to find and attack the Tirpitz.

12 Albacores of 817 and 832 squadrons find and attack her just out of Vestffjord. No hits were recorded, but we lost 2 Albacores, shot down by German air cover,.

At the same time 3 JU 88's made an unsuccessful attack on Victorious.

The pressure was heating up with the days getting lighter, with more and bigger convoys, and the Russian calling for more and more supplies.

22 March---9 April. 1942

Battleship Duke of York (V.Ad. Curtis)

B/Cruiser Renown

Carrier Victorious

Cruiser Nigeria

Destroyers 6

Convoy PQ13 19 ships from Reykjavik

Convoy QP9 19 ships From Kola Inlet

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QP 9 made it back with no losses, but one of its escorting minesweepers was damaged when it rammed and sank U-655.

PQ13 and its escort, which included the cruiser Trinidad and destroyers Eclipse and Fury were scattered by severe gales in the entrance to the Barents Sea. On the 29th 3 German destroyers crossed swords with the escort just north of Murmansk. 1 of the Germans was sunk but the Trinidad was damaged, and was later attacked by U-585. The attack failed and the U-boat was in turn sunk by Fury. 5 of the merchant ship were lost. 2 to submarines, 2 to aircraft. and 1 to the destroyers.

In the mean time we were full filling our usual function, backstop force up the North East of Iceland, between the convoys and the Norwegian coast. Usual attacks on coastal traffic on the way back. Our aircraft carried out numerous sorties along the coast for small shipping, and anti –submarine patrols without much success

11 April.---25 April 1942

Battleships King George v (Ad. Tovey) Duke of York

Carrier Victorious

Cruisers Kent, Nigeria

Destroyers 8

Convoy PQ 14 24 ships from Reykjavik

Convoy QP 11 16 ships from Kola Inlet

Of the 24 ships in PQ 14 which set out for Russia, only 7 arrived. 1 was sunk by a U –boat, and 16 had to turn back because of the gales which were off the Beaufort scale. QP10, running with the weather, managed to get 12 ships back to Reykjavik, having lost 2 to submarines, and 2 to aircraft.

We were covering along the coast, but we were bouncing about so much that it was impossible to fly off aircraft. In the Air Defence Position, right on the top of the bridge structure, my action station, as communication number, the swing, exaggerated as it was by the height, was such that we were moving through an arc of up to 100 feet, There were several instances when I didn't think we would make it upright again. Out to Starboard, about half a mile away was one of the destroyers, one of the tribal class, almost as big as a light cruiser, and we saw a giant wave lift it so that it was balanced in the middle on top of it, Then the wave just dropped away, leaving the destroyer suspended by inertia in mid air, and we could see daylight under the whole length of the hull. Then it dropped, creating a huge fountain of water, and it disapeared. It seemed like hours before she popped up like a cork, shook herself, and carried on. I might have thought I had imagined it, if were not for the fact that at least 8 others on the ADP had seen, and as I found out later, so had a lot of others who were at open air action stations, such as the Pompoms, Bofors and 4.5 gunnery directors crews

Needless to say, we did not see any action on that run. The Germans weren't as silly as us, so didn't come out, but were content to sneak U-boats north.

The next convoy was to set the pattern for future convoys. While the threat of the German fleet kept the main British fleet tied up, guarding against a break out, it left the German aircraft, operating from airfields along the northern coast of Norway, and U-boats, working from Tromso, and Altenfiord, who by now were hunting in packs of up to 20; free to savage the convoys. The smaller RN ships making up the close escorts did a magnificent job, but were fighting uneven odds. Whether the German High Command realised it or not, they were

effectively neutralizing most of the heavyweights of the RN in northern waters, without their own ships using a drop of fuel oil.

27 April--12 May 1942

The fleet was being graced by the addition of American forces, which at the start created a little bit of uncertainty as to who was going to make the decisions. After all, we had been doing it a bit longer than them, but they had a reputation for thinking they were the greatest, and should lead the band. However, in this instance, Ad. Tovey called the shots.

Battleships King George V (Ad. Tovey) USS Washinton (R.Ad. Giffen)

Carrier Victorious

Cruisers Kenya USS Tuscaloosa, Wichita

Destroyers 4RN, 4US

PQ 15 (50 ships) from Reykjavik

QP 11 (13 ships) from Kola Inlet

We were to carry out our usual job of covering the rear of the convoy, and fly anti-submarine patrols. The big boys were there in case of?. With the northern spring coming up the length of daylight was increasing, but we were plagued by dense fogs, due to the lack of wind and the slight warming of the surface water and spent a lot of time running on the fog buoy markers at, for us, reduced speed.

Then, five days out, May 1st, at 15-45 disaster struck.

We were running in line ahead, KGV, Washington, Victorious, Kenya, in dense fog, keeping station on the fog buoy of the ship ahead. (Kenya was our rear guard. Carriers always operated with a cruiser covering their stern about ½ a mile back, because they were so vulnerable when flying off and landing. Where ever possible the same cruiser did the job, so that the ships developed a rapport with one another. Kenya was one of our favorites.), Suddenly there were sounds of under water explosions. You feel them as much as hear them. But they were obviously some where ahead of us, and the first thoughts were of torpedo attack on either the KGV, or Washington. The fleet did a routine scatter exercise. and it was some time before we found out that KGV, weighing in at 36000 ton, and doing 15knots, hit the 1500 ton destroyer Punjabi smack amidships, and cut her in two. The two halves went, one either side of KGV, and the explosions we heard were Punjabi's deck racks of depth charges on her stern, which meant that the stern half was already at least 30 foot under water as by the time it reached the stern of KGV, they reached their settings and detonated severely damaging KGV steering gear (Punjabi carried 16 depth charges on her quarter deck, 2 rows of 8, in tracks which slightly over hang the stern, so that when they were released, as they could be, singly or in pairs, they fell clear of the ship. They were primed and set ready for action, usually the first 2 on each track at 30 feet, the next 2 at 45 feet, and so on, in increments of fifteen feet. The Hydrostatic valve is designed to blow the charge at the designated depth. The depth gradient is calculated to follow a submarine down as it dives.).

The miracle was that there were so few casualties, 49 lost out of 250. The cause of the accident was deeply buried in the Admiralty archives.

KGV had to retreat to Hvalfjod in Iceland, the RN base, just round the corner from Reykjavik, where they affected temporary repairs before going back to Scapa It must have been a sticky trip back to Iceland, steering with her engines. In the meantime things had not gone well for the convoys they were really hurt.

Of the 50 ships in PQ15, only 22 reached Murmansk, while QP11 lost one. This was typical, the Germans concentrating on the loaded north bound ships.

With KGV away. R.Ad Giffen on the Washington was nominally in charge, but there was no change to our routine, and we eventually arrived back at Hvalfjord, on the 12th. May. We had used the fjord as a base for the last 2 outings. It was even bleaker than Scapa Flow, but with a completely different topography. Where the Orkney islands, which are made up of more than seventy islands, most of them uninhabited, about twenty miles off the northeast coast of mainland Scotland. had low hills, none more than 150 feet high, few trees and always had wind and rain from one direction or the other. The largest island is known as Mainland or Pomona, on which there are two towns, Kirkwall (the administrative seat) and Stromness. The anchorage, Scapa Flow, is a large open expanse of water, about 15 miles across, surrounded by the inlands. The gaps between the islands were closed by anti- submarine booms and the passages were mined. The entry was through one gap protected by a boom, a mined channel and a permanent patrol of 4 sloops.

Hvalfjord was right the opposite, running about 12 miles inland, and about 2 miles at the widest point, It was surrounded by mountains up to 2000ft high, which came almost straight down into the water, with odd flat pieces of ground here and there, just a few feet above the water. Most had little houses and farm lets on them. The houses almost seemed to be part of the land, being built of local rock, and partly dug in the ground. They all had one or more of the double-ended boats peculiar to Iceland. This was their only means of transport and communication.

We anchored right at the head of the fjord, and on this occasion, had 2 of the US destroyers berthed alongside, and we quickly realised that they were a good source of American cigarettes, and candy. They also liked to gamble on cards, but some of them came unstuck when they tried to teach a couple of our Pontoon experts how to play Blackjack. They didn't realise that it was two names for the same game.

10 days tidying up, provisioning, and oiling from the tanker that was waiting for us, then it was off again.

21 May –1 June 1942

Battleships Duke of York, (R.Ad. Curtis), USS Washington (R.Ad. Giffen)

Carrier Victorious

Cruisers Kenya, USS Tuscaloosa, Wichita.

Destroyers 4 British, 4 US.

PQ 16 (35 ships) from Iceland Only 20 ships arrived in Murmansk.

QP 12 (27 ships) from Kola inlet Only 13 ships arrived in Iceland.

In this instance the south bound convoy was hit as hard as the north bound.

Things were not helped by the fact that there was only about 4 hours dark each day, and the weather was not so rough, which made it easier for the submarines to lurk at periscope depth, which made it harder to spot them.

We carried out our usual hunt for coastal shipping on the way back, bagging a couple of possibles.

Then came, though we did not know it at the time, Victorious's last participation for quite a while, in the mayhem that was the Russian Convoys

And this one was to be a real blood bath.

Convoy PQ17, mustered in Hvalfjord. 35 merchant ships bound for Murmansk under the command of Commodore John Dowding. It's close escort was the First Escort Group, under Commander Jack Broome.

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This consisted of 6 destroyers, 10 corvettes, 6 armed trawlers, 2 anti-aircraft auxiliaries, 1 Fleet tanker, and 3 rescue ships, and a bit further back, was the First Cruiser Squadron, under RA. Hamilton, consisting of 4 cruisers and 4 destroyers. At the same time QP 13 consisting of 26 Merchant ship, with an escort of 5 destroyers, 3 corvettes, 3 minesweepers, 1 AA cruiser, 2 trawlers, and 1 submarine, bound for Iceland.

200 mile further back was the main fleet heavies,

Battleships Duke of York (Ad. Tovey) USS Washington (R. Ad. Giffen)

Carrier Victorious

Cruisers Cumberland, Nigeria

Destroyers 9

This force was to shadow the convoy till it had passed North Cape.

The Convoy route took it close to Svalbad, north of Bjornoya, and skirted the edge of the ice pack, before turning south and following the of Novoya Zemlya, turning south-west across the Barents sea, to enter the White Sea, and then turning south to Murmansk.

! ship suffered mechanical failure just out of port and had to turn back. Another; SS Exford turned back after sustaining ice damage. The convoy was sighted and tracked by U-456 shortly after it entered the open sea. This was augmented by Luftwaffe BV 138s from July 1st, but the first losses were not till the July 4th, when 2 ships SS Christopher Newport and SS William Hooper were lost.

Remember, at this time of the year, in these latitudes, there was almost 24 hours of daylight, and the weather being reasonably settled, there was no place to hide.

On July 4th came the action which destroyed the Merchant Service's trust in the RN. That night the Admiralty received news that the German capital ships Tirpitz, Admiral Scheer, and Admiral Hipper, with a destroyer escort had left Trondheim to intercept the convoy.

First Sea Lord Sir Dudley Pound, after agonising for several hours, eventually made the fateful decision to scatter the convoys, reasoning that the Tirpitz, with it's high speed, and 15inch guns would be capable of inflicting massive losses on the closely packed merchant ships. Pound at that time was operating under tremendous pressure, and the effect of the brain tumor that led to his death 8 months later, but the merchant service as a whole perceived this as throwing them to the wolves to protect the capital ships

With the Cruiser Group and the rear group ordered to return to port the only protection the merchant ships had left was the close escort of Destroyers, AA ships, corvettes, minesweepers, and armed trawlers.

This left the scattered merchant ships easy prey to U-boats and aircraft.

12 merchant were sunk on the 5th 6 by aircraft and 6 by U-boats, and on the 6th 2 more. 1 by U-boat and 1 by the Luftwaffe. On the 8th 5 more were sunk.

The remaining escort vessels withdrew into the Artic circle on the 9th, and no more ships were sunk that day, but 2 more were sunk on the 10th.

German records after the war showed that over 200 sorties had been flown against that one convoy.

Two surviving ships limped into Archangel on the 10th, and another 9 either there or Murmansk over the next week.

In all 142,000 tons of shipping had been sunk at the cost of 153 lives. Material losses include 3,350 motor vehicles, 430 tanks, and around 95,000 tons of general cargo. 2 of the surviving ship were sunk on the return journey.

Despite Soviet protests the sailing of PQ 18, from Loch Ewe in Scotland, was postponed until 2nd September, but, despite having over 40 escorts, 13 of the 40 merchant ships were sunk and 11 damaged, so all convoys were stopped till the full darkness of winter. PQ19/JW 51 sailed at the end of December 1942.

The Convoys continued with the same loss of ships and men, with some ships now coming from Halifax, Nova Scotia and joined the PQ ships from the Clyde around the Bear island area.

The last one JW 67 sailed on May 12th. The 23 Merchant ships all reached Kola Inlet on the 20th. 3 days later a return convoy of 23 ships set out for the Clyde. All arrived safely on May 31st.

** From August 1941, 78 convoys, made up of 1,400 merchant ships had sailed in both directions, with a loss of 85, mainly in first 2 years, a loss of 6%. Millions of tons of vital cargo, and thousands of tanks and aircraft were delivered to the Russians. The cost to the RN was 1 escort carrier, 2 cruisers, 6 destroyers, and 8 other escort ships. The Germans lost Scharnhorst, Tirpitz, 3 destroyers, and over 30 U-Boats. The cost in human life was in the thousands, very few survived the icy waters and the oil slicks of the sunken ships, and that is not counting the air crews.**

Though we did not realise it at the time, PQ 17 was to be our last jaunt in Arctic waters for quite a long while/

By 11th July we were back in Scapa Flow, then it was all hands on deck, cleaning and re-stocking, flying squadron off and then flying other on, in training mode. In our spare time, we were all hanging over the ship's on stages or bosun's chairs, painting in a new camouflage. As most of us knew it to be the same as the Mediterranean Fleet camouflage, it was not hard to work out where we were going next.

Finally 0700 on July 31st we left Scapa with the cruiser Sirious, the destroyers, Fury, Foresight, Intepid, and Icurus, all 4 were equipped with high speed mine sweeping gear, which was destined to play a big part in the up coming operation. Later that day we were met in the Atlantic by the elderly carrier Argus, and transferred the 12 Sea Hurricanes of 885 squadron, our first of the more modern aircraft being allocated to the FAA.

Nelson and Rodney, escorted by Ashanti, Tartar, Eskimo, Somali, Pathfinder, and Quentin, left Scapa and made speed, to catch us up in the north Atlantic.

Found out later that Furious was supposed to join us from the Clyde with a load of 41 VB Spitfires, but at the last moment it was discovered that because of the larger propeller blades on this MK of Spitfire, and the pronounced hump in the center of the Furious's flight deck the planes could not take off. Somebody must have had to write a 'Please Explain'. But all was not lost, 42 smaller propellers and a spare Spitfire were acquired post-haste, the Furious, escorted by the cruiser Manchester and 3 destroyers left the Clyde at 2300 August 4th and the maintenance crews spent 2 days changing the propellers. The spare Spitfire was used to test the take off ability, after which it was all systems go,

On out in to the Atlantic, and south, well out from Ireland's west coast, Southern Ireland was sympathetic to the Germans and strongly suspected of harboring some of the U-boats that hunted in the north Atlantic.

By this time we knew we were headed for Gibraltar but not what we were to do when we got there. There were no incidents on the way apart from a possible sinking of a U-boat in a pincher movement by 2 of the destroyer screen, just as we entered the fringe of the Bay of Biscay. The kill was never confirmed.

When we arrived at the marshalling area off the Straights of Gibraltar, it was immediately obvious that something big was in the offing. The area was full of ships in all directions and we were told the good news. Winston Churchill had ordered an all out attempt to push a supply convoy, and replacement aircraft in to Malta.

It was to be the most important single convoy of the War, Malta, with it's few surviving ships, submarines, and aircraft, was the only thing slowing the supply of troops and supplies to Rommel's army in North Africa; and Malta was on the point of collapse from lack of supplies. If Malta went, North Africa would go with them. The convoy and escort was the strongest concentration of ships to date made up of 36 Fighting ships, over 100 aircraft, and 14 of the fastest merchant ships available, As First Sea Lord as well as Prime Minister, Churchill had made it clear that he was prepared to take heavy casualties to get some of the convoy through. In the spirit of the saying attributed to Cmndr Hooky Walker of the 3rd? anti-Submarine Group, working out of Liverpool:-

'Damm the Torpedoes, Full speed ahead'

The Operation was code named 'Pedestal' and consisted of:-

Battleships	Nelson (V.Ad.Syfret)	Rodney	
Carriers	Victorious (R.Ad. Lyster)	Indomitable, Eagle, Furious.	
Cruisers	Sirious, Pheobe, Charydis, Kenya, Manchester, Cairo, (AA)		
Destroyers	24		
Aircraft	Victorious	809 & 884 squadrons	16 Fulmars
		885 squadron	6 Sea Hurrcanes
		832 squadron	12 Albacores
Indomitable		806 squadron	10 Martlets
		800 squadron	12 Sea Hurricanes
		880 squadron	12 Sea Hurricanes
		827 squadron	12 Albacores
Eagle		801 squadron	16 Sea Hurricanes
Furious			38 Spitfires (for Malta)
14 Merchant ships, each capable of 15 knots or better under the command of Commodore A.G.Venerables			
	Almeria Lykes	7,773 ton,	Brisbane Star 12,790 ton
	Clan Ferguson	7.374 ton	Deucalion 7,516 ton
	Empire Hope	12.688 ton	Dorset 10,624 ton
	Glenorchy	8,982 ton	Melbourne Star 12,806 ton
	Ohio	9.514 ton	Port Chalmers 8,535 ton
	Rochester Castle	7,795 ton	Santa Elisa 8,379 ton
	Waimarama	12,843 ton	Wairangi 12,400 ton

This convoy was to be different to the Russian convoys in that the Merchant ships would be right in the middle, surrounded by the escort.

The Germans and Italian forces consisted of:-

3 Heavy Cruisers, 3 Light Cruisers, Motor Torpedo Boats, 21 Submarines
784 Plane, Fighters. Heavy Bombers, Torpedo Bombers, Dive Bombers
Based in Sardinia, Sicily, and Pantelliria, they covered most of the Mediterranean, And thanks to their intelligence network in La Linia and Gibraltar they probably knew to the man the strength of our forces.

The each merchant ship carried a senior RN officer, retired Lt. Commanders or above, and 2 senior visual signal ratings, to liaise with the fleet.

On the way to the mustering point, the merchant ships had intensive training in station keeping and fleet maneuvers, so that by the time they arrived, they were good enough to take part in a Spithead Revue. The merchant Skippers were not too happy about working like this, but realised that precise maneuvers at high speed were necessary in the close confines of the Mediterranean, particularly when we got nearer the narrows off Sardinia.

The next 2 days was very busy as the destroyers had their oil topped up from the cruisers and the bigger ships, but not the carriers as we had to stay mobile in case we had to supply air cover,

Then, at 2300 on the 9th, in thick fog, the massive fleet slid through the Straits, watched; as far as it was possible to see in the fog, by numerous fishing boats on both the Spanish and the Tunisian sides, probable at least 10% of whom were relaying information to the Axis powers.

The morning dawned clear, and the force increased speed to 14 knots. It was essential to balance the speed against the consumption of fuel oil,

The day was bright, and it was nice and warm at my action station in the ADP, where I would spend the best part of the next 5 days. It was from there that, at 1315 on the next day, 11th, I saw the Eagle hit, as I found out later, by 4 torpedoes from U-73,. She went down in approximately 7 min. with a loss of 260 out of a crew of 1160. 6 of her Sea Hurricanes which had been flying a covering air patrol over the fleet, landed on us.

At about 1600, the Italian Submarine Uarsciek made an unsuccessful attack on us, we had to make a crash turn to starboard to comb the tracks. (present the ship's bow to the attack. A smaller target) The ship heeled so far over that from the ADP we were just about looking down on the torpedoes as they shot by about 100 yards off the starboard side. It was a bit spine tingling, especially after seeing how quick the Eagle went down. Then it was fairly quiet for a while, and a couple of hands from each action station, in turn, were allowed down to the galley to draw action rations for the rest of their station. Bully beef sandwiches and Kai (a thick cocoa, made with block cocoa and custard powder. Standard rations for action stations, Officers included. The Kai was a carry over from Nelson's day) personally, I could not stand the stuff.

Just on dusk, heavy attacks by J.U.88's and H.E.111's started, and went on continuously till full dark, but failed to do any damage to us. We didn't at that stage, know what had happened to the rest of the fleet. During all this time, our own aircraft were in the air, and engaged in several dog fights. Flying off, or landing on was the danger time for carriers, having to turn into the wind, increase speed to 28-30 knots in a straight line, and hold a steady course till the plane landed. We also had to make sure it was one of our planes, not a bogie coming in with a bomb. This was where the rapport between the carrier and the escorting cruiser was so important. They sat off too one side of our wake, and any doubt about the origin of the incoming plane, and they opened up with their full AA armament, which was considerable. They had 8 lookouts on the bridge who were intensively trained, even more so than ours, in aircraft recognition, and the guns opened up on the first call of one of them. Very much a case of shoot first and confirm the identity later. It was rare for them to make a mistake, but their specialized work, plus the IFF (identify, friend or foe) system saved more the one carrier over the course of the war.

A quite night, then next morning, 12th less than 100 miles of Sardinia, the day started with an attack by J.U.88's.

These were followed over the course of the day with attacks by aircraft and submarines. The first was just after sunrise; 4 bombers came in low out of the sun, loaded with 250lb? armour piercing bombs from the starboard quarter, taking everyone by surprise. The only bombs that hit us, hit at such an angle that they ricocheted off across the after end of the flight deck, just forward of the after lift, one leaving a groove 6 foot long and ½ inch deep between No 1 and 2 arrestor wires, then out over the port side. One of the bomber was shot down after it had passed over the ship by the 2 port side multiple PomPoms, each of which had 8 barrels which fired 2 at a time in sequence and could put up a 1000 2 pound shells a minute. (They were commonly known as Chicargo Pianos)

We were very lucky. Had they come in 10 foot lower, and released their bombs on the same trajectory they would have hit around the thinly armored quarter deck area and taken our stern out, probable crippling our screws and steering. This was one of the incidents that gave Victorious the reputation of being a lucky ship. There were numerous further attack through the day by J.U.87 Stuka dive bombers. These were really frightening, they had tubes under their wing, like big whistles, and they screamed as they came down almost vertically, It was amazing to see them pull out at the bottom of their dive seemingly feet above the water, then waves of HE 111's fitted as torpedo bombers. Sadly we were told the Stukas had scored 3 hits on the Indomitable, one down the open after lift (the Achilles heel of all carriers), setting the hanger on fire, and 2 direct hits on A1 4.5in AA turret This left us as the only operational carrier.

There were also several submarine attacks, but our luck held. It would be interesting to know how many ships owe their lives to dud torpedoes There were repeated references in German records accessed after the war of torpedoes failing to run.

During the night of the 13th Furious and 8 destroyer detached and moved over closer to the Tunisian coast with the 38 Spitfires either ranged for take-off, or ready in the hanger to come up on deck. Take off was scheduled for first light, and they were to fly to Malta in 3 wings, each escorted by a Halifax. After fly off, Furious and escort returned to Gibraltar, then the destroyers promptly turned and made full speed to rejoin the fleet.

35 of the Spitfires landed on Malta, but they took out 8 German and Italian planes on the way. Considering they were all fairly young green pilots, they did a marvelous job.

On the 13th the carrier force, already in dangerously constricted waters, turned back to the west, and the convoy and their close escort fought their way through a lethal mix of aircraft, submarines, E-boats, and anything else the Axis could throw at them, in fact. It was thought there was an element of overkill, with the Germans and Italians forces getting in one another's way;

The Convoy survivors finally made it in to Valletta on the 15th August; Saint Marija Day (The Convoy is still remembered and Blessed to this day and are part of the celebrations of this public holiday, as the Saint Marija Convoy)

If I seem to be referring here to attacks specific to the Victorious, it is not through any lack of interest in the other ships, but because we were too busy to do other. We did get occasional updates on the progress, but it was not till years later that I realised the magnitude of the event. Several books have been written about it, but the written word can't really convey the noise and sense of urgency and danger that filled those five days.

The price was heavy, but it achieved its purpose. Malta could carry on,

The Roll of Honour

Royal Naval Ships sunk:-	Eagle, Manchester, Cario, Foresight.
Merchant Ships sunk :-	Deucalean, Santa Elisa, Almeria Lykes, Waimarama, Dorset, Glenorchy, Clan Ferguson, Empire Hope
Royal Naval Ships damaged	Indomintable, Nigeria, Kenya, Ithurriel.
Merchant Ships damaged	Rochester Castle, Brisbane Star, Port Chalmers, Melbourne, Ohio

These five made it to harbour. The Ohio, the tanker, and the most important single ship in the convoy; was hit three times; and with it's bow blown off made it in to Valetta, stern first, lashed between two destroyers.

Nearly 150,000 tons of Naval and Merchant ships went to the bottom, and over 450 men died, with a further 200 injured.

The carrier force made its way back to Gibraltar through a gauntlet of air and submarine attacks, but arrived on the 15th with only a few minor scratches.

From there we went back to Scapa, and on the way, I had my 18th birthday, and officially changed from a seaman boy to a seaman, with an increase in pay from 9shilling and 8pence per week, (of which I received 2shilling in cash, the rest being held in my account, only to be drawn against for purchase of clothes, leave, or such other special reasons). to 14shillings and 6pence, the end of the compulsory saving, and the right to draw as I wished against what was already saved. I also moved from the boy's mess deck, 1 of the last 3 boys on board, to the general mess deck with the big boys, not that it made much difference, as I had been working with most of them for over 18 months.

Back in Scapa Flow general cleanup, and a couple of boring months training squadrons, including the now more common Sea Hurricanes Usually out each morning, back at dusk, four or five days a week, with the only relief a run ashore to the Fleet canteen in Scapa, for an Ensa Show, or a game of 'Rugby', which usually degenerated into a mud bath, the rugby ground being in a hollow, and as I think I mentioned earlier, rain was the rule rather than the exception.

The Fleet Canteen was the size of a large aircraft hanger, in fact I think that is what it had been before being shifted there. There was a bar down one side, and just inside the door a counter where you bought your tickets for beer if you were over 21. You had to show your Pay Book, which had your photo and age, and you could get 3 tickets, each for 1 pint (That was the official rule, but the NAAFI Staff who ran the canteen didn't care as long as you had the money, 4 pence per pint. .The staff had learned quite early that you didn't argue with a Matelot in search of a drink). Didn't worry me as I did not drink, not on principle but because I did not like beer, and I was under age anyway, not that made any difference, there was always someone who would get you a pint. You just stood up to drink. It was not unusual for there to be upward to a 1000 men milling around, consequently the floor was often wetter than the rugby pitch, and the noise deafening. Next door was a smaller hut where you could get a cup of 'Tea' and a bun, and there was also a make shift theatre, were you could watch a film or sometimes a live show, put on either by Ensa, or one of the ships, some of which were very good. The amount of talent, in various fields among the ships companies was amazing

Leave, from 1300 to 1700 was allocated to the non-duty part of the non-duty watch, and those who were going ashore, did so, in our case, from where we were anchored, the 7+ miles trip to shore in a north sea drifter.

Dozens of these drifters had been commandeered at the start of the war to be used as lighters for the fleet, and were allocated 1,2, or 3 to each ship according to it's size, and they where the fetch and carry vehicles for the fleet. One of their jobs was to pick up the liberty men from their allocated ship at 1300, take them into Scapa jetty, which was big enough to take 3 drifters each side, and return for them at 1630. The liberty men had to be on the drifter before 1700, when they cast off, or they would not get back to their ship, and would be classed as absent over leave. There were often 24 or more, 3 or 4 deep at the jetty, they carried no identification other than their port registration number, which if you were wise you memorized on each run ashore, because it was not always the same drifter serving your ship. Add to that the often 7 or 8 hundred matelotes, a good percentage of whom were very nicely thank you, with the odd one having to be carried, the intense rivalry between the ships, resulting in a lot of banter between the various crews, which led to a bit of shuffling and in the odd case a punch up, and you can perhaps imagine what a bedlam it was, and why I rarely went ashore I preferred to stay aboard and amuse myself, I read a lot, and I amused myself with several hobbies, two of which made me a few shillings extra pocket money. On my first leave, I saw displayed in a photographic shop in Cardiff, some photographs which had been coloured using dyes. Being of a curious nature, I went in to find out how it was done, was given a demonstration by the lady who was doing them, and finished up buying a set of dyes and brushes, complete with instructions. After a bit of practice, I got quite good at it and some of the blokes were happy to pay a couple of pence to see their girl friends in glorious Technicolor. I even did one of his wife and her dog for the Commander.

The other one was making fancy brooches out of pieces of Perspecs from broken aircraft windscreens, which was easy to source in the hanger. Cut out a shape, hearts were popular, sand it down with fine wet and dry emery cloth, also available in the hanger, as was the final ingredient, Amyl Acetate. Having sanded the brooch, it was painted with the Amyl Acetate, which melted the surface, causing it to draw out to a smooth, polished surface. The same technique as was used for removing flaws from the windscreens. Then you painted a name on the back, sealing it with white aircraft dope, stuck on a small safety pin, and there you are; sixpence please. The fumes of the aircraft dope could be a bit iffy in enclosed spaces, so that part was done out on deck.

The ships company were divided into 2 watches each of which was in turn divided in to 2 parts. 1 watch would be duty, and 1 half of the other would be on standby. While in harbour an anti-aircraft watch was always closed up at dusk on a 1 in 4 watch basis. 2 of the 6 PomPoms, 4 Borfors, and 6 Oerlikens, 8 A A lookouts, and 2 Gunnery communication numbers, under a warrant gunner, or a gunner's mate. I was still one of the communication numbers, but I was lucky enough to be on with Chief Gunners Mate Jan Folland, who had been in charge of the boy's mess deck, and who had been in charge of my AA watch since I was rotated from being the Commander's messenger after nearly a year in on that job.

There were not many nights that the AA alarm was not sounded, calling all AA crews to action stations. The Radar was still in it's infancy, and there was always a Radar operator some where in the fleet who saw things that weren't there, and pressed the panic button. You really couldn't blame them, particularly some of the destroyer crews, after what they been through, for being twitchy.

Our next outing was the beginning of November, just about the time when every one was getting bored with the daily in and out for exercises four or five days a week, and the strain of the continual false alarms. These were more stressful and tiring because it was impossible to settle to anything. In one 24 hour we had 17 false alarms. At least when on an operation we were in defence watches, or all closed up at action station, and our bodies got used to some kind of a routine.

***As a point of interest, the watches were set up as follows. The ship's company was divided into quarters:-

1st part Starboard, 2nd part Starboard, 1st part Port, 2nd part Port.

Action Stations. Everyone closed up. (Danger imminent or visible)

Defence Stations, 1st and 2nd Starboard or Port. (watch about, Danger in area)

Cruising Stations 1st or 2nd of either watch (in transit though 'Friendly' waters)

The watch times from midnight were:-

0001-0400 middle watch, 0400-0800 morning watch, 0800-1230 forenoon watch, 1230-1600 afternoon watch, 1600-1800 1st dogwatch, 1800-2000 2nd dogwatch, 2000-2400 first watch.

The reason for the 4 1/2 hour forenoon watch was to allow the afternoon watch time for their midday meal. They came off the morning watch, had breakfast, and worked cleaning ship, etc, till 1200, when they had lunch, then relieved the forenoon watch at 1230. The forenoon watch were then free till 1600 (known as a 'Make and Mend', another throw back to Nelson's Days, when the time was supposed to be used for making and repairing personal clothes). The next change was at 1600, the watch off had a meal at 1730 before changing over again at 1800, when the off coming watch had their meal. Change over again at 2000, then at 0000 the whole process was repeated, but now the Port and Starboard watch had changed round. This was the purpose of the Dog watches, to rotate the watches.

Merchant Service crews, however, worked a 3 man rotation, working the same watch every day, a straight 4 on, 8 off, plus what was called day work, where they worked 2 hours out of their 8 daylight hours off, cleaning, or repairs.***

All we knew when we left Scapa, was that it was another big do in the Mediterranean. It's hard to keep a secret on a ship. Not that we were told anything, just worked it out from the bits and pieces that were heard or seen.

Operation Torch.

Battle ships Duke of York (V.Ad. Syfret), Nelson, Rodney.

Carriers Victorious (R.Ad Lyster), Formidable, Furious.

Cruisers Argonaut, Bermuda, Sirious.

Destroyers 12

Landings in North Africa at Casablanca, Algiers, and Oran, though we did not know this at the time. All we were told was about Oran, which was our target. What we did see, was that all our planes and air crew had American markings, and the feeling was pretty high about this. Was this another case of we do the work, and the Americans take the credit. .

When we were given the full story later, and we realised the size of the operation, it began to make a bit of sense.

Simultaneous assaults were made on all three places at the same time.

All Tanks, trucks, planes, etc. had US markings, all troops wore US insignia, and operated under the US flag.

The story was that the Vichy French, who held North Africa at that time, would offer less resistance to the Americans, than to the British, who they hated, as much as the British hated them. A mutual feeling going back many hundreds of years, but brought to the surface again by the French actions, or lack of them, at Dunkirk, and the knowledge that over half the French actively collaborated with the Germans.

The total force was comprised of 507 ships, of all shapes and sizes, 106,300 troops, 250 light tanks, 160 medium tanks, and over 200 aircraft.

Victorious's function was to lay off; about 40 miles from the coast, and keep her aircraft in the air, strafing in support of ground troops, spotting for ground artillery, spotting for the Big Boys when they got a chance to blow the cobwebs out of their guns. And, armed with depth charges, maintained a regular anti-submarine patrol in conjunction with the destroyers, and 20 long range Hamiltons flying from Gibraltar on regular patrols. The destroyers had claimed 2 definite kills, and the Hamiltons had bagged 3 definite and 4 possibles. One of our Pilots, Lt. Barry Nation of 882 squadron even landed to accept the surrender of Blida aerodrome.

In eight days our aircraft flew over 400 sorties, and when we withdrew on the 15th, the FAA personnel, and the flight deck personnel were just about at the end of their rope. For the rest of us, it wasn't too bad. We were doing the hitting for a change.

We withdrew straight back to Scapa, arriving back to the familiar sight of gloom and rain, on the 19th.

****Years later the reason for the Americans fronting the invasion of North Africa was somewhat clarified in the many books and articles published by various sideline experts. In a few less than the thousands of words that have been written:-

Stalin was pressing for a second front to be opened in Europe.

Marshall and Nimitz wanted all American forces to be concentrated in the Pacific.

Eisenhower wanted to open a second front across the English Channel into France.

Churchill vetoed a second front from Britain at that stage of the war, foreseeing that it would result in a blood bath worse than any in WW1 (His words)

Roosevelt agreed with Churchill, and in a most unusual move, evoked his power as Supreme Commander of the American forces, to give orders to his Senior Commanders to co-operate with their British counterparts, and plan a second front 'In North Africa'. The European second front was to wait while the American factories poured out the supplies that would be needed, and the time was right. The use of American insignia and flags was something of a face-saver for the Americans. As it was, Marshall tried to claim the credit for the success of the landings ****

Our stay in Scapa was fairly short, and even more boring than usual. We didn't even have the break of our daily exercise runs, then after 9 days of make work, and swinging round the buoy, we were on our way again, strictly secret, but everyone knew we were on our way to Rosyth for major work and modifications. Had a quiet trip down to Rosyth. Flew off the Squadrons, and did a few practice runs at streaming paravanes, a device which was reputed to sweep the ships path clear of mines. In fact, if we were entering suspect waters, our destroyer escort did the mine sweeping.

We arrived in Rosyth on the morning of December 1st, and spent the best part of the day getting snuggled in. Once we were in dry dock, we were 'officially' told that we would be there for about six weeks. And that each watch would get ten days leave, Starboard Watch December 6th to 16th, Port Watch December 17th to 27th. As I was Port watch, that meant I would be home for Christmas.

The time till I went on leave passed pretty fast. After the first leave party left, there was a bit more work for each individual, and with the dock yard workers swarming all over the ship, some of them working round the clock shifts, conditions were far from comfortable. Luckily we did not get lumbered with any funeral parties this time.

It was a different atmosphere altogether from being at sea on watches, and though we could get ashore every second day, tempers got a bit strained, and little niggles tended to turn into big ones, some ending in a punchup.

I have since found that this is fairly common when there are prolonged dockings. Possibly the same feeling one would have with lots of strangers taking over and stomping around in their home.

I did use the chance to re-acquaint myself with my cousins in Kirkaldy. I never did acquire a taste for Scots Dancing, but I did spend several pleasant evenings there, in spite of the language difficulties. Even though we both spoke English.

I left on leave on the 17th, and found the travel situation had not improved at all since the last time I had gone on leave from Waverly Station, in Princess street Edinburgh, right under the shadow of the Castle. Neither had the situation at home, I had grown away from them so much, we did not have a lot in common. I joined in as much as I could, but I was quite glad to get back on board. I did at least come back with the materials for another side line, several sheets of dressed leather, and the tools and accessories to make leather handbags, which later sold quite well.

Back on board I was sorry to find out our Captain, H. C. Bovell had left, to be replaced by Captain L. N. McIntosh (The McIntosh of McIntosh), former Captain of the Eagle.

Suddenly our six weeks stay had shrunk to four weeks, and we left Rosyth early on December 29th, two days after port watch returned from leave, on our way back to Scapa; and Boy, did we work on that trip. Cleaning up after the dockies, some of whom had come with us to finish off what they were doing, exercises with the new gear, endless fly off and landing practice. Firing practice with all armaments, at plane towed drogues, and destroyer towed raft targets. Plus several practice Action Stations. All on top of the normal watch keeping. We had just reached Scapa, when we were told to turn around and go away again. As a belated reply to the American plea for Carrier re-inforcement in the Pacific, Victorious was detached from the Home Fleet, and sent to join the American Fleet on a sort of reverse lease-lend arrangement

So, in company with the AA cruiser Pheobe, and three of the latest destroyers, Quickmatch, Racehorse, and Redoubt, away we went across the Atlantic to Norfolk, Virginia, arriving January 5th, 1943, only to be put straight back into dry dock, while the destroyers turned back home, leaving Pheobe with us. Major structural alterations. The round-down at the stern of the flight deck was built up over the top of the original armoured round down, to add an extra 10 foot to the length of the flight deck, and flatten it out. This was to accommodate the American landing practices. Our Pilots sort of came in low, and rose on to the deck, where as the American Pilots came in high, and dropped on to it.

A gallery was built about eight foot under this extension, the full width of the ship and curving around each end a distance of about six feet. On this gallery were mounted an extra twenty Oerlikons. (we already had 56 at various points around the ship). Each capable of firing 450 20mm shells per minute over a distance of 2000 metres. They were placed to cover a field of fire from 145o Starboard to 145o Port, and from sea level up to 500 metres. Thus covering the favourite window for an attacking Japanese aircraft, particularly when the carrier was flying off, or landing on aircraft. In these circumstances the carrier was tied to a straight course and constant speed in to the wind. They had been known to try and join the carriers incoming aircraft.

Access to the gun platform was by a covered ladder from the quarterdeck. Not a nice place to be at action stations, perched 40 feet above the wake of the ship. The wake of a 32000 ton ship doing 25 to 30 knots can be quite impressive, plus the up and down motion if there is a dirty sea running. I was very glad I was not an Oerlikon gunner.

All our aircraft spares, armaments, including depth charges, and torpedoes were unloaded, and all FAA personel went to a big US Navy complex and airfield just outside Norfolk, for what turned out to be three weeks intensive training on Avenger torpedo bombers and Martlett single seater fighters , which were going to replace our old Albacores and Fulmars.

The Americans were security mad. Every dockyard worker on board had a rating allocated to watch him full time, and if he was welding on a bulkhead, he had two. One in the compartment he was in, and one in the compartment which backed on to it, both armed with fire extinguishers. As there were a lot of them, and they worked right through in shifts, they put quite a stain on our manpower. The American Naval Authorities could not do anything about this arrangement as it was a civil law, and out of their hands. After much argument' it was arranged that they would supply working parties to help with the handling of the re-armament stores And when they did, that started a real fire storm.

Remember we were in West Virginia, the birthplace of rabid segregationists and the Klu Klux Klan, who were still, apparently alive and well. We had already found that public transport, restaurants, and every other public facility were plainly marked, 'Whites Only' and 'Others'. So when the first working party arrived at the gangway, it was not surprising to see they were negroes, escorted by four white naval NCOs complete with side arms and batons.

When the O.O.W. refused them permission to come aboard carrying arms, in which he included the batons, he was asked, in less than polite terms," how do you expect us to keep these black 'B's in order without guns". The O.O.W. was adamant, and it finished up with a big con-flab between Capt. McIntosh and the base Senior Officer, with I believe, signals to and from Admiralty. They must have backed McIntosh, because from there on the work party arrived at the ship, complete with armed escort, who then turned them over to the O.O.W, did an about turn and departed, no doubt spitting and spluttering about the damm limeys giving the F**** black B**** ideas above their station.

These working parties worked with however many of the ship's company could be mustered, but it took them a while to feel at ease working alongside, and doing the same jobs as 'you mad whites' as they called us. And they did work, hard. Perhaps we sowed the seeds of a cultural revolution, This discrimination caused quite a few fights ashore, and as the American Naval Police were so bigoted, we instituted our own shore patrols to work with them.

On 10th January, I; along with 24 other ex-boys who had joined the ship on commissioning, went on five days propaganda leave to Washington, as guests of, and at the expense of the British Embassy. Travel was on a genuine stern wheel paddle steamer, leaving Newport at 1700, and arriving at 0830 the next morning. We had 2 berth cabins, and an evening meal, and breakfast were part of the fare. On arrival we were taken by coach to the Embassy, where we were introduced to the people who would be our hosts for the next four days and three nights.

There had obviously been some research done on our background, because another lad, David (Dai) Wryght also from Cardiff, and I were allocated to a middle aged couple, Colin and Martha Roach, who had picked us from a list that had been submitted to them. Mrs. Roach chose us because her mother had come from Cardiff as an Army bride in 1919. The Mother, who was not in good health, lived somewhere outside New York, and the Father was dead, so we did not get to meet her. We did establish in talking with Mrs Roach that her Mother had lived not far from where I lived, the town end of Llandaff Road it was a street of grand, three story houses where the big money used to live. Dai. on the other hand lived right across the other side of Cardiff. I used to deliver milk (as apart time job while still at school) in that area so was able to give Mrs. Roach some insight to the type of area it was. Then she told me that her mother had been a live in palour maid, when she met her Father.

They had a daughter, Kathleen, who was home from University. She was about a year older than me, which made her the same age as Dai.

After lunch, we were taken for a drive round the sights of Washington, very nice while we were in the car, but when we got out to look at the memorials, etc, of which there were dozens, it was freezing, and we sadly missed our Artic gear.

That night after a smashing dinner, we all went to see an Ice Extravaganza which was Fantastic. I had never seen anything like it.

The next day, Kathleen took us, in her Dad's car, to see a friend of hers from University who lived outside Washington on a small farmlet, (what we would call a life style section), in a place called Chevy Chase in Maryland. When we arrived, the place was like something from a film set. Big White House, with a colonnaded front door, manicured green lawns, and white painted rail fences complete with a couple of horses. And when Kathleen's friend came out to greet us, she fitted right into the picture, even to the voice. A real genuine, Southern Belle. All that was missing was the Magnolias. But we did get the mint juleps when we got inside. Her name even fitted in, EmiLou Hartley.

We spent a very pleasant day there, had a look round, and I had my first introduction to the outside of a horse, just a gentle walk round the paddock, and I really enjoyed it, particularly as EmiLou accompanied me on the other horse.

After a pleasant lunch we sort of paired off. Dai, a real ladies man, had taken a shine to Kathleen, and I found EmiLou very easy to talk too. We had completely different backgrounds, about which we chatted quite freely. Her Father was a career naval officer, on shore duty in Washington, and her Mother worked in a law office in the local town. She was at university, and hoped eventually to study law, but was not very hopeful bearing in mind the prejudice against women in the professions at that time in history, particularly in the South.

We also discovered that our birthday were the same. She was two years older than me, which meant her next birthday would be her twenty- first, something that would put me in a very embarrassing position at a later date.

We exchanged addresses and promised to keep in touch, and indeed I wrote and received a few letters over the time we were in American waters. One thing the Americans were very diligent about was the delivery of, mail, films and ice cream. They took priority over all other stores.

That night was the big do at the British Embassy, where we were to be put on show. There we were joined by a similar number of US junior cadet seamen.

These could not join till they were eighteen, unlike our boys who could join at fifteen. In conversation with some of them, we found that their training, compared to ours, was virtually non-existent, comprising of four weeks of the bare basics, barely enough to teach them how to press their clothes and clean their shoes. For this they were paid nearly four times our ordinary seaman's pay. When, after the dinner, the Ambassador and some of the big wigs were circulating, they were hit by this complaint from every one of our boys they spoke to. But some of it must have sunk in, because shortly thereafter a cost of living allowance of fifty cents US per day for all UK Personnel serving in the US. was instigated. That was worth an extra twenty two shilling a week at the going rate of exchange. Almost trebling my pay. One particular thing I remember about that dinner, was the music. There was a big band (32 players. I counted them) which I was later told was Artie Shaw's Band, but the part I thoroughly enjoyed was a quartet of negro close harmony singers, one of whom was almost a soprano. They were introduced as a new group. But it was not long before they made a name for themselves as the 'Inkspots'. The next day, Dai and I were invited to lunch by Kathleen, at a sort of club, frequented by girls from the University. At least, that is what she said it was, but after a while, I came to the conclusion that it was an active cell of the Confederate movement. It was a surprise to find how many of the people I met refused to acknowledge that the Union had won the Civil War. The Mason-Dickson line was a very real thing to them. We had an enjoyable afternoon, but again, I was amazed at the narrowness of their thinking. We were quizzed on all sorts of subjects, but more than kept our end up in most areas, apart from current music and shows, which seemed to be their main topic of conversation.

Then it was back to the Billet, Kathleen again driving, pack up, and down to the steamer wharf, where we thanked Mr and Mrs Roach for their hospitality, and boarded for the trip back to the world of welding torches, hammers banging, the sound of the ventilation fans and the characteristic smell of the messdeck. It is suprising how you miss it.

Work continued as before, and somehow or other things came together, and on February 10th. we left Norfolk bound for the Pacific via the Panama Canal. Down the coast of Georgia and passing between the Bahamas and Florida, round the corner of Havana, and through the Yucatan Channel into the Carribean, stopping at Kinston, Jamaica to disembark some Government people we were giving a passage. Only stpped there about six hours. A lovely looking place, a big round harbour, surrounded by greenery, with the town on a hill right opposite the entrance. The houses were scattered up the hill, all painted different shades of yellow, pink, blue, and green.

On from there, to arrive at Colon mid-afternoon on the 14th. Chiefs and Petty Officers were granted shore leave till 2100, but I don't think those that went, were terrible impressed. A frontier shanty-town, swarming with mossies, was how I heard it described. Meanwhile, the seamen, plus the mechanical artificers left on board were very busy.

They had to unbolt, and lift inboard, all the bolt-on Oerlikon platforms from both sides of the ship, plus anything else which protruded outside the line of the flight deck. Apparently, we would only have inches to spare going through the locks. The Panama Canal is 50 miles from ocean to ocean, The maximum width of the navigable channel is 500ft. There are 6 pairs of locks, 3 pair each end. Each lock is 1000ft long and 110ft wide. At the Caribbean end, the ship is lifted 85 feet into Lake Gutan, continues across the lake to the start of the canal proper, then down the other 3 locks to sea level in the Pacific.

At that time, because of our size, the whole trip took best part of 2 days. We had to anchor in lake over night, (now, a ship of equivalent size can go through in eight to twelve hours). It took about three hours in each lock. towed in by little trains, three each side, which were driven by ratchet wheels, and directed by a 'pilot' on the flight deck. He must have walked miles from one side of the ship to the other, directing them as they inched us in and out. Most of the ship's company were on the flight deck at some time or the other, watching the operation, but it got boring after a while.

Once we were in the lake, we were restricted to a bare walking pace. It was possible to see the wild life on some of the islands we passed, and the occasional alligator in the water. When we anchored for the night just off the entrance to Pacific section of the canal, nobody wanted to go swimming.

We were on the move at daylight the next morning into the downhill run to the Pacific, arriving in Panama late in the afternoon, and staying the next day to replace the Oerlikon mountings. Each watch got four hours shore leave. I went ashore, but I don't know why I bothered. Panama was a dump, at least the parts we could get too. I believe there were big estates and flash houses outside of town for the top military and government people. It put me in mind of my trip up the River Plate in 1939 to Vila Constitution, with the peons sleeping in the streets. We left the next morning, with the Port watch at Defense stations. I was still at my old station in the ADP and so had a grandstand view of the little surprise which the Americans sprung on us.

We were just getting up to speed, when, out from behind an island about four or five miles ahead of us, six US MTBs (or PT boats as the Americans called them) suddenly appeared to make a dummy attack on us. Immediately Capt, MacIntosh, who had first hand experience with Italian MTBs, turned straight towards them, giving them the narrowest target, ordered full speed, and all hands to action stations. Action stations were closed up and reported within three minutes. By this time we were up to near full speed, going nearly as fast as the PT boats, which must have given them a bit of a shock. By this time the two antagonists were closing at over seventy five knots (85 mph).

The PT boats torpedoes are set so that they could only be fired 10o either side of the bow, and they normally tried to come in right angles to the target's fore and aft line. At the speed we were closing they did not have a show, and as they passed down the ships side, we theoretical raked them with every PomPom, Borfor, and Oerlikan, that could be brought to bear. We even tracked them with the 4.5 LA-HA guns just to drive the message home. They sprung the surprise, but I think we had the last laugh. Captain MacIntosh gave a commentry over the public address system later, a thing he did on a regular basis., and estimated that we would have sunk at least four of the six. His closing comment, "That will teach them not to play with the big boys".

He also commented, that had they waited till we were closer before they came out of hiding, it might have been a different story.

He was very good at keeping the ship's company informed of what was going on, unlike our previous Captain, who was very aloof, and believed that all the ship's company needed to know was the last order.

Feb 17th On our way to Pearl Harbour. In four days I would become eligible, at eighteen and a half, for promotion to Able Bodied Seaman, (AB). As a prerequisite I had taken a course in basic torpedo, mines, depth charges, lighting, ventilation and telephones, given by the Chief Torpedo Gunner's Mate (Ch.TGM), with a verbal exam by the Torpedo Divisional Officer (A Lieutenant). I quite enjoyed the course, and I passed with a good mark, 86%. He asked me if I would be interested in transferring to the torpedo division, if I did, put in a request after I got my AB rating.

Being fed up, after nearly two years, of spending more than half my time at action, defense, cruising and harbour defense watches in the ADP, and all the make work jobs when off watch, I did give it thought, plus discussing it with several of the torpedo branch ratings. While I would still be primary a seaman, the work would certainly be more interesting, The Torpedo Division's name was rather misleading. While they were responsible for preparation of torpedoes, depth charges, and mines, the main part of their work was the maintenance of all lighting, ventilation, and phones, and the operation of winches and cranes. Control panels, generators, and the like came under the control of Electrical Artificers.

On February 25th. I duly stood in front of the Captain, and had my request to be rated Able Seaman granted. The next day I put in a request to transfer to the Torpedo Division, which was granted a week later, and I became a member of the torpedo party on three months trail.

I shifted my gear from the seaman's mess deck to the smaller torpedo division's mess deck, where I was introduced to Leading Torpedo Operator Les Jones, (who despite his name, was not Welsh, but a Scuser, as all Liverpoolians were called) who would be responsible for the first part of my training. He was second in charge of the torpedo room, where all routine testing and adjustments were. There was room for sixty Torpedoes in racks, four high and five wide on three bulkheads, and six more, ready use, on trolleys with telescopic beds, so that they could be raised from deck level to five feet high for speedy loading into the belly of the Grumman Avengers TB's with which we were to be eventually equipped. The racks were empty at that time, the 18in fish carried by the Sword fish having been left in Norfolk. They would be replaced in Pearl harbour by the American 24inch torpedoes for the Grumman Avengers.

On the ship's outer bulkhead side was a lift, similar to the aircraft lift, in that the deck of it was eight inches thick armour steel. This was for taking the torpedoes, or depth charges, depending on what duty the planes were on, up to the flight deck. A lot of heavy physical work was involved, the planes were loaded and unloaded quite frequently, as their duties were altered, or as they were rotated in and out of the hanger. No armed planes were allowed in the hanger. Also the torpedoes themselves were constantly being shifted around in the torpedo room. They were given a maintenance routine at regular intervals of not more than six months. This routine took about 70 man hours, with two people working on each, so with sixty six torpedoes to do, it was a full time job.

There were sixteen of us in the torpedo room party, with four changes every month, with every one in the Torpedo Division below Chief taking a turn. This also applied to the other section of the Division.

The other sections in the division consisted of Lighting, Ventilation, and Communication. These were divided so that two or three STs and one LTO covered a specified area of the ship for maintenance and repair in each category. The areas covered were not all the same size. Ventilation, for instance, required much more work than lighting, so the areas were smaller.

The working routine was somewhat different to the watchkeeping routine I had been used to. Still had the same 1st and 2nd part of the Port and Starboard, but everyone worked day work then the duty part went on stand by from 1800 to 0800, some in the torpedo room, and some in the electrical workshop. Should a big job come up, the non-duty part of the watch could be called out. The only exception was the four STs on telephone exchange duty. They worked normal watches. There were also designated winch and crane drivers in each part of each watch, who would be called on as required, the port and starboard cranes were also manned any time flying was taking place. (See photo facing page three).

We eventually arrived in Pearl Harbour on March 4th 1943, and again, were stuck straight in to dry dock. Further alterations were made to the arrestor wires and crash barriers, to accommodate the heavier Grumman Avengers which we were to take on here. The Assisted Take Off (ATG) was modified, and the part in which I was involved, the guts was ripped out of the Torpedo room, and new racks fitted

While the powers that be had allowed for the fact that the Avengers took different fish, someone along the line had overlooked the fact that our torpedo room racks and set up, were useless for the bigger (fatter but not as long) American Whitheads. As a result we finished up with only 46 fish in place of our original 60. The replacement loading trolleys also prove to be a pain in the neck. Work was very slow, mainly due to lack of skilled workers, consequently we were in dry dock from March 8th till the end of April,

We had plenty of chances to go ashore, and we were made quite a fuss of, but while I took the opportunity to see some of the sights, life aboard while in dry dock was not much fun.

The Naval facilities were on Ford Island, and while we could easily get over to the 'Mainland' to get transport in to town, it was easier to spend an afternoon at the recreational complex on the island, where everything from exotic food to a huge swimming pool about the size of a football field was available, but with the draw back of no alcoholic drink. This did not worry me, but a lot of the crew went in to Honolulu where it was available 24 hours a day.

The three things I particularly remember were,

1- The Royal Hawaiian Dancers, who came aboard and put on a show on our flight deck. Conditioned by the films and stars like Dorothy Lamour, we had a shock when we saw the dancers. I don't think one would have been less than 15 stone, but when they started to dance you forgot their size, and marvelled at their movements.

2- The Dole Pineapple canning factory. Surrounded by thousands of acres of pineapple plants, through which the road from the landing jetty to town meandered, there was not a fence in sight. They were there for anybody to pick, and some of the crew did just that.

This practice resulted in some dire results. Within a week, crew members, and some officers, were walking around the ship with their lips blown up like balloons. No-one had told us that the bumps inside the rind of the pineapple contained an acid which irritated the skin, and trying to get the last mouthful out of a slice, as well as being very painful, it caused the lips swell. I was glad that I did not like Pineapple.

The school holidays were arranged so that the children could pick the main crop, which they then sold to the canning factory. The Factory itself was surmounted by a huge tank in the form of, guess what, a Pineapple. It was not filled with water, but pineapple juice, which, as I found out when I did a tour of the factory, was on tap at various places inside the factory, and at stand pipes out in the grounds. In front of the factory, was a big maze made out of pineapple bushes. If you got stuck in the maze you need not go hungry or thirsty. At least that was what we were told by the guide who showed us round. He also told us that the grounds had deteriorated from what they used to be, due to lack of staff, a large number of whom were now taken up with the war effort.

3- The Pali. One of the workmen, a native Hawaiian, who was working on the rebuild of the torpedo room, with whom I had had several interesting talks about the history of the Island, we were on, which was not called Hawaii at all, but Oahu, invited several of us to a sight seeing tour. We accepted, and spent a very pleasant afternoon, looking at several points of interest, including the Royal Palace, at that time a museum, till finally we finished at a lookout, protected by a waist high stone wall. From the look out we could see miles of low lying coastal plain, to the sea; but looking straight down, which was rather difficult to do, one, because of the thickness of the wall, and two, because of the force of the updraft of wind, was spectacular

The cliff, or more properly a bluff, was, we were told, over 800ft high, and was under slung, so that there was an uninterrupted drop to the dense bush at the bottom. Facing the west, the afternoon sun heated the dark face, the heat boosting the strength and speed of the already strong onshore wind which was common on that shore in the afternoons, so that the updraft had been measured at 150 mph under ideal conditions.

Our guide told us legend had it, that until fairly recent times, warriors proved their manhood by jumping off the edge, with their cloaks spread like wings, and, hopefully floated down to a soft landing in the bush at the bottom. I suppose it is not much different to the Tower jump at Vanautu.

After the tour we went home to our guide's house for a meal, where we found numerous other people in what turned out to be a religious cult meeting, but we took off smartly when they tried to convert us, and made our own way back to the ship.

Finally, the work was finished, and we now had 46 torpedoes in the racks, and 6 on loading trolleys. The Fleet Air Arm maintenance crews were aboard with all their spares, so there was one final sweep up, and away we went on May 8th to fly on our new Avenger and Martlett squadrons, and to exercise in the American way of doing things.

We went out about fifty miles of the north coast of Hawaii in company with the carrier Saratoga, the battleship North Carolina, and about ten destroyers. We also had a permanent escort of two Catalina seaplanes doing an anti-submarine patrol just on the horizon.

They kept up this patrol the whole time we were out, from the 8th to the 26th of May, alternately changing planes every six hours. The Americans were certainly prolific in their use of resources, as we were to find out over the next six months. Ask for it, you've got it, but we also found out they were equally prolific in their use of human resources, as can be seen by the number of casualties on their landings, on the many islands invaded by them.

The purpose of the exercises was to familiarise us, with their fleet maneuvers, and the flying crews with their flying procedure. One thing that took the pilots a lot of getting used to was that their Batman's signals were almost the opposite to ours, which made for quite a bit of confusion on both carriers. One thing that emerged from the exercises, was that when the Americans were flying on or off, the whole fleet turned into the wind, but with our superior speed, we could turn out of line with two or three destroyers, put the foot down, complete flying, then back to join the fleet, who, in the meantime, had continued on their original course, thus saving time and fuel oil.

A lot of this I picked up later, because, after the first day out, I do not remember much for a week or so. On the second day I was on duty in the torpedo room 'helping' the LTO do a Routine Inspection on Receipt on one of the new fish. I felt lousy, lightheaded (more so than usual), hard to breath, and my chest was in a clamp. I had just asked the LTO if I could go to the sick bay, when I passed out. And I don't remember the next four days.

I seemed to remember voices at a great distance, but when I finally returned to earth, I found I had spent most of the last four days in a cold blanket bath, trying to keep my temperature down. The doctor didn't seem to be sure what it was, and classed it under the general heading of a form of Bronchitis, plus a fever of some kind. A very exact diagnosis, and of course, no anti-biotics in those days. I was kept in for another three days, before being released to light duty for seven days.

On reporting back to the torpedo room for light duties, I was given the job of sorting the paper work on the new fish, and depth charges. Each torpedo was allocated a number, and a history sheet, on which was entered details of all routine test and inspections it was subject to till it was finally fired, after which a report from the firer was added, including results ,if any.

There were numerous inspections, each with it's own check list, signed off by the senior person doing it. A complete strip down and check when they came aboard, a thorough check over before being loaded on a plane. Another equally thorough check when they were unloaded from the plane, both before removal, which was the most dangerous time, while making sure that the safety wire had not been jerked out, meaning that the mercury fulmanide detonator might be wound in to the primer, thereby arming the torpedo. I only saw this happen once. The pilot had released the torpedo, but it hung up, falling just far enough to pull out the safety wedge, but not clearing the bomb bay. The Avenger had a history of the bomb bay doors failing to open fully.

The pilot warned the Bridge, the flight deck was cleared of aircraft and personnel, Everyone crossed their fingers while the plane landed, and the Chief TGI 'volunteered' to wind the detonator back by hand, turning the little paddle wheel, normally driven by air flow and water flow once it hit the water, backwards, the 200 revolutions required to withdraw the detonator.

If the Pilot did not think he had a good approach, the crew bailed out near one of the screen, then he locked the controls, and bailed out himself.

This way, the plane hit the water far enough away so that no one suffered the shock if the torpedo exploded.

Eventually, someone had the bright idea of making the wire lanyard long enough so that the torpedo had to be clear of the bomb bay before the safety wedge was pulled out, and all chief TGI's heaved a sigh of relief.

A lot of the crew, particularly the FAA , who had been working on the shore base, had bought some of the American style work clothes, and were wearing, blue jean trousers and blue denim shirts.

These were so much easier to wear, and keep clean in the tropical weather than the regulation RN rig which was either white tropical rig, or one piece blue boiler suits; that Capt. McIntosh, after consulting with Admiralty ordered the Purser's store to acquire sufficient stocks to issue all crew members with two free sets, after which they could be purchased in the usual manner. (Much later this rig became the official working dress throughout the RN).

On completion of work up, we left Hawaiian waters, with the Saratoga and North Carolina, going south to New Caledonia, to be based at Numea as part of US Fleet Task Group 36-3, under the overall command of Ad.Halsey. We continued to exercise on the way, and I think both sides learned from each other, with our biggest lesson being the way the Americans did their refueling, much easier, and twice as fast as our system. This was to stand us in good stead later in the war, when the British Pacific Fleet was formed.

We arrived in Numea towards the end of May. The anchorage in the lagoon was an eye opener after places like Scapa and Iceland. We came in through an opening between the end of the reef, which ran all the way down the west side of New Caledonia, almost touching the island most of the way, then swinging seaward about thirty miles from the end of it in a hook , leaving an entry about five miles wide between it and a small island, I now know to be the Isle of Pines. Though the entry was fairly wide, the deep water channel restricted what could be used by the capital ships.

Inside, it opened out to about ten miles across, and about thirty miles up to where it closed in to within half a mile from the shore. About ten miles in, on our starboard side a big bay opened out inland; with the Capital town Numea on the southern headland.

The fleet anchorage was further in, diagonally opposite the town, as though they had parked us as far away from the town as possible. Remember, New Caledonia was French, and the only ones the French, disliked more than the British were the Japanese, otherwise we would not have been allowed in. And the dislike and lack of trust was reciprocated.

The bay was surrounded by ranges of low hills, covered with tropical trees and with silver sand beaches coming down to the water, which was a vivid blue. In the background were much higher hills, which properly qualified to be called mountains,

. On the other side of the bay, nearer the town was the Catalina Seaplane base, a very busy place, with the planes landing and taking off at all hours of the day and night. The planes maintained a twenty-four hour anti- submarine patrol over a circular area with a radius of two hundred miles from their base. I don't know how many of them were there. They took off and landed in threes, and there always seemed to be twelve or more at their mooring at any given time. I used to spend quite a bit of my off time watching them, and the town behind them through the big gunnery control binoculars in the ADP.

I spent quite a bit of my off duty time, while in harbour, using the big 20-70 binoculars mounted on the ADI (automatic direction indicator) pedestal, one each side of the ADP. In action, the Gunnery officer Lt Cdr Gordon, or whichever officer that was doing the watch, would pick up the bearing and elevation from the lookout, check the target, and if it was doubtful, order the gun directors and pom-poms on the appropriate side to 'follow Indicator', which transmitted the bearing and inclination to them electrically.

The glasses were kept in a closed compartment at the base of the ADI pedestal when not in use, but I had Scouse Gordon's permission to use them when I wished. I was on very good terms with him, partly because I had been his communication rating so long, and partly because I had pulled him out of the water during a gale while we were in Hvalfjord. (but that's another story).

While it was no longer my action station since I had transferred to the torpedo division, I enjoyed going up there, when the weather was good, either to have a quiet read away from the noise on the messdeck, or to watch what was going on in the harbour. With those big glasses it was amazing what you could see.

While we were in Numea, there was no shore leave to the town, but the two cutters were used to ferry anyone off watch who wished to go, to one of the beaches. Those who wished to, and were over twenty one, could pay at the NAAFI canteen for two cans of beer, for which they received a token, redeemed when the cutter hit the shore. Needless to say, there was quite a lot of trafficking in this tokens, and some of the shoregoers returned somewhat the worse for wear. Some of them came back on board with red and black banded snakes, three to four foot long, which were skinned and made into belts. Then an announcement was made over the public address system that these were banded Coral Snakes, and were one of the most poisonous snakes alive.

The amazing thing was that nobody was bitten, even though one of the stokers bagged eighteen of them. The waters off those beaches were swarming with them, so swimming as a pastime ceased to be so popular.

We went out several times with Saratoga and North Carolina though the rest of May, and into June including the first Cross-Carrier operation when we swapped aircraft with Saratoga. The weather was glorious, and the war seemed a long way away.

One trick we learned after our first trip out. Unlike the RN, whose ships entered harbour in orderly procession, the Americans got to within three or four miles of the entrance, then it was every man for himself. We got caught on the hop the first time, but after that, Capt. McIntosh put the foot down, and we were at anchor before the other big boys got in. This turned into quite a competition, and it was amazing that there were no collisions, but with our speed advantage, only the destroyers had any chance of beating us.

In the middle of June we finally got back into the war, albeit at a distance. Task Group 36-3 joined forces with Task Group 63-3 to cover the landing on New Georgia, Operation Cartwheel. Our function was to provide air cover and intelligence to the landing forces. We were kept busy with the flying, and the torpedo room party had plenty to do loading and removing torpedoes and depth charges, and once again our superior speed was put to full use in that we could turn out of line to fly off, or on, while the rest of the fleet maintained formation. We were at sea for just over seven weeks, and we had plenty of practice taking on stores, including huge amounts of dehydrated potatoes and eggs, and of taking on oil. But on board, we saw nothing of the action.

Our planes, while not bearing the brunt, saw quite a lot of action. We were only involved in a small sub-section of Op. Cartwheel, code named Op. Toenail, very appropriately named, as we were right at the foot of the Solomon's, with action going on all the way up the whole 200 plus miles of the group.

It was hard to take in, that while we were in effect, taking a cruise up and down the designated track, forty miles away people; lots of people were being killed or injured. On New Georgia alone, just one of the six simultaneous operations going on under the code name Cartwheel: 1200 died, 3200 were injured, and 800 were missing, and the Japanese lost similar numbers. The Japanese lost over 350 planes and the Americans 98 (their figures) mainly in the northern end of the island group. The Victorious only lost I Avenger, and I Martlett, both due to engine failure. The crews were picked up.

But that did not stop us remembering that one torpedo in the right place from a sneaky submarine could put 2000 crew in jeopardy. A typical example of the vulnerability of ships was HMS Hood, one shell, and 1415 men died; and she could see her enemy. A lesson none of us ever forgot.

On a lighter note, the dehydrated potatoes and eggs did not get a vote of approval when they first appeared on the menu. The potatoes were like wallpaper paste and the eggs defied description. An SOS was sent out, and shortly thereafter a destroyer pulled alongside Saratoga, and two senior cooks were transferred, via the destroyer, to us, along with 80 one gallon buckets of ice cream as a consolation prize. The two American cooks stayed on board for two weeks, and by the time they left, we were being served with top quality creamed, mashed potatoes and delicious scrambled eggs. I don't know what other magic the American cooks worked, but our overall menu was vastly improved, and the supply of ice cream became a regular thing.

The Americans were geared to spend much longer periods at sea than the RN, 80 to 90 days being quite common, mainly due to the much greater distances in the Pacific, and as a result they had a first class train of supply ships, and the art of transferring stores at sea perfected.

It became a joke among us; their order of priority when taking on stores. First was the mail, then the latest films, then Ice Cream, followed by food stocks, and last of all ammunition. But when it came to oiling, they left us way behind. The tanker would take station and with their high speed pumps and side by side configuration, they would oil four destroyers or two capital ships or any combination, in less than half the time we took with our own oilers.

When the oiler was servicing the smaller ships, cruisers and destroyers, they were on and off like calves on a milk dispenser.

This routine carried on from early in June to near the end of July, when we once again had our little race to be first in the harbour in Numea. Then it was all hands to a general clean up. In the mean time, I had finished my stint in the torpedo room and was now attached to the Island and Flight deck party, an LTO and four STs to service lighting, phones, small motor etc, in the Island, and all the flying lights on the flight deck. (a full time job on their own). As the planes landed, they frequently broke the little brass cages that covered the lights, so that they had to be cleared off, the screw holes drilled and tapped, no easy job in the armored steel, and new ones fitted. Also two of the STs had to man the port and starboard cranes the whole time flying was in progress, ready to shift any wrecks, and if necessary drop them over the side, if there was not time for the little donkey to tow them up forward of the crash barriers.

During close action, it was the policy to keep the aircraft lifts up to maintain the integrity of the armoured flight deck, so any planes that crashed on landing were either towed up in front of the crash barriers, or dumped over the side, at the discretion of the flight deck officer, AKA Bats.

The crash barriers were like three, five foot high tennis nets, spaced about six foot apart across the width of the flight deck, made of half inch steel wire rope. They lay flat on the deck, just abreast the after end of the island when not in use, and were raised upright by hydraulic rams during landings. The plane used the after end of the flight deck to land, but if it's hook missed catching one of the five arrester wires, and failed to stop, the crash barriers did, stopping it smashing into any planes ranged on the forward half of the deck. Once it came safely to a halt, the barriers were lowered, the plane taxied forward, and the barriers raised again for the next landing. At least this was the theory, but in practice, it was not unknown for a plane to bounce, miss the arrester wires and clear the barriers like a hurdler when the pilot picked up revs in an attempt to get back in the air. If he was quick enough, it could be done, but if he wasn't it was a mess. During any lulls, recently landed and damaged planes were struck down, using the forward lift, and when that was completed the replacement were ranged, using the after hatch, so that the two hatches were never down at the same time,

If this sounds cumbersome, it wasn't. The flight deck party of about 60 men forming the Flight Deck Division, all from the seaman branch, were so skilled and quick that if you turned you back for two minutes you missed the action. The slowest part, which set the pace was the speed of the lifts. Add the arming of the planes, torpedoes, depth charges, and later, when they came into common use, rockets, which was all done on the flight deck, and it was organized chaos. Only the machine guns were re-armed in the hanger.

It was early in August when we arrived back in Numea, and apart from a burst of spit and polish, we had a fairly easy week, including cross visits to the Saratoga. I went on one, as one of a party of ten, all from different branches. We did a general tour, then where partnered off with one of the Americans from our own branch. Their torpedo room was very similar to ours, not surprising as our was rebuilt in Norfolk to take their fish. But there the likeness ended, and speaking to others who went over, my impression was re-enforced. Their skills were very limited, good in what they specialized in, but no depth.

This also coincided with the impression I had received talking to the cadets at the dinner in Washington. Minimal technical training, the emphasis being on the yes sir, no sir, aspect, and sorting out their multiple uniforms. I was shown one of the marine's locker and it was full. He told me he had eleven different uniforms, excluding work clothes, but he only had to take seven to sea, the rest were back in the barracks.

I came to the conclusion, while in no way doubting their courage and dedication, that they had a shop window mentality, every thing was show. As I had seen in Norfolk and Washington, and from reading had found to be true of many other cities, big glossy buildings in the main street covered shanty town slums behind them. The ship was the same when viewed from our conception of a fighting ship. A basic hull plated over to form the deck of the hanger. Steel pillars about twenty feet high every twenty feet around the edge, plus another row down the middle, supporting cross beams on which was built the flight deck of four inch wooden beams.

The sides between the uprights were filled in with steel roller shutters that would not stop a revolver bullet. Down below in the parts I saw, the mess deck was huge; with seating, I was told, for 500. The sleeping areas, bunks, not hammocks, were on similar scale. The number of ships they lost, was partly due to this type of construction. The amazing thing is that they did not lose more. One decent hole below the waterline, and they would go down like a bucket with no bottom, But I did very much enjoy my lunch. In that field they were light years ahead of the RN. They, on the other hand could not understand why we put up with the relatively crude condition aboard our ships.

I wonder what they would have thought of the German's water tight compartmentization That made ours look like the wide open spaces. And it is said that the crew members were shut in their compartment most of the time they were at sea.

Early on; I think; the 10th August we prepared for sea, and got under way. Strangely, there was no sign of movement from Saratoga or North Carolina, but as we got closer we could see the marine band, in full uniform, on the flight deck of Saratoga, then, as we came abreast, she sounded the general salute, and the band struck up with 'California here I come'. That was the first inkling most of us had that we might be going home, and from the clue given by the tune, via San Diego. Now we knew why we had oiled and provisioned the previous day.

We were joined on the way out by the cruiser USS Wichita and three destroyers, who were to escort us on our approx 3500 nautical mile trip, from 22oSouth to 36oNorth. At our cruising speed of 18knots, about nine days.

It was a real cruise, we maintained a one in four cruising watch, Capt McIntosh was not a believer in make work jobs, If there was work to be done, it was done smartly, otherwise the crew were reasonably free within the bounds of their routine duties. As a result, he always got maximum effort when it was asked for. Three of our Avengers, at a time, loaded with depth charges, kept up an anti-submarine patrol from daylight to dark. They changed over every two hours, which I would think was enough for them, before the boredom of going round and round took the edge off their alertness.

There were three in the crew, and they all had their specific areas to cover. The pilot scanned in front, the mid gunner to one side, and the rear gunner the other side. In the area we were travelling, they also checked for planes, but there was little risk of enemy planes so far from the centre of action, and our radar would have picked them up first anyway. In an area prone to enemy air activity, that was the rear gunner job, apart from shooting down any he saw.

There a few short lived false alarms caused by sightings of whales, which apparently migrated north at that time of the year, We had pleasant trip with good weather all the way, spent a lot of time on the flight deck, playing deck hockey in between planes taking of or landing, or just lounging about.

The Island and Flight deck party had a small compartment for a workshop in the base of the island, and I formed the habit of sleeping there. There was a public address speaker so I could keep up with what was happening, but it was still quieter than the mess deck. Also, it was my cruising station anyway, so I did not have far to go to get on watch, and if things were quiet I subbed the other ST, and did the double watch, so he did not complain. If you have gathered from this that I did not like sleeping in the messdeck, if I could avoid it, you are right.

Eventually we arrived in San Diego about midday 19th August. I remember that date because it is my youngest's brother's birthday, and two days before my own 19th birthday on the 21st. And thereby hangs a tale.

We secured port side to, alongside a wharf, with, ahead of us, a ferry terminal. Working out the lay of the land, we were in a bay, with a big island in the centre, to starboard of us, on which was the Naval air station, and the ferry was the only connection to the city proper. After we had been there a few hours, and seen three or four ferries come in we were struck with a strange fact. Three out of four women using the ferry were, to put it politely, pregnant. The Yanks had a reputation, but this was over the top. It took us a little while to find out these were service men's wives, going to the maternity section of the naval hospital on the air base, for check ups.

The next day was the day I fell in it. I was working on the starboard crane just after lunch when the quartermaster piped a salute 'Attention all hands on deck, face to starboard'. From my vantage point, I saw a barge flying a pennant, which had come from the air base, sweeping round to come in to our starboard after (officers) gangway. Then we got the pipe 'carry on'. About ten minutes later a pipe for "Able Seaman Gallie report to the OOW on the starboard after gangway.

Searching my mind for what wrongdoing of mine had been discovered, I made my way to the lower starboard boat deck, and as I stepped through the bulkhead door, you could have floored me with the proverbial feather. There, talking to the OOW; was EmiLou Hartley, the Southern Belle. The OOW, Lt White (commonly refereed to, but not to his face, as Knocker), who had been my DO when I was in the Quarterdeck division. A fellow Cardiffian and member of our scratch rugby team; turned to me with a smirk on his face, and said "Able Seaman Gallie, would you please escort this young lady on a short tour of the upper decks, emphasizing 'upper', and be back here within the hour." I didn't get a chance to open, my mouth or perhaps I should say; close it, before he said "Right carry on". Away I went with EmiLou, along the upper boat deck, feeling eyes digging in to my back all the way, up on to the flight deck, and up through the island to my favorite quiet spot, the ADP. Luckily there was no-one working up there, so we had a chance to talk.

The story was quite straight forward. Her father, who had been a Lt. Cmdr. when we were in Washington, was now a full Cmdr. and in San Diego as ADC to Vice Admiral Tysdale, the OIC of the San Diego Naval Units. San Diego at that time had not yet achieved the status of a naval base, but was designated as a repair depot, but with the naval air base added in. it was a fairly big command.

EmiLou and her Mother were on holiday, staying with her father, so when the VA .planned a courtesy visit on Capt. McIntosh she asked her father if it might be possible for me to attend her 21st birthday party, which was to be held the following evening, as she remembered my birthday was the same day as hers. He said he would see what he could do.

The result was her visit in the Admiral's barge, and as I found out much later, her father had mentioned it to the VA. who in turn mentioned it to Capt McIntosh, who in turn suggested to my Divisional Officer, that in the interest of 'Inter-Fleet Relations' I should be granted leave from 1700 to 2359 on the 21st.

When she invited me, I said I would love to come, but it would depend on me getting someone to sub me, as I was duty watch from mid-day the next day. She said she thought I would be able to manage it.

We caught up with the news, not that I had much, She had finished college, and was working in the same law office as her mother, but planned to go back to try to get a law degree next year. She was engaged to a naval pilot who was at present at sea, but had no immediate plans for a wedding. Her friend Kathleen asked to remembered to me and if possible Dia Whyght. Kathleen has received one letter from Dia but nothing more. I told her that Dia was still on board, but I saw very little of him, he had got so big headed. (He had gone from Able Seaman to Killick to Acting Petty Officer in less than a year in the Aircraft Handling Division, which had been formed as an adjunct to the FAA fifteen months before, and having got in on the ground floor, was well on his way to being a Chief by the time he was twenty five.), and to tell Kathleen not to hold her breathe waiting for him to write. I had written to Mr and Mrs Roach, just before we left Norfolk to thank them for their hospitality, and, having received no reply, left it at that.

All too soon it was time to return to the starboard after gangway. We got back with just time to say TatTa before the brass arrived, and the gangway was flooded with gold braid. I got the second big shock when Cmdr.V.N.Surtees, our Commander, whose messenger I had been for the first eight month I had been on board, and who I considered the best seaman on board, a thorough gentleman, if a bit straight laced, took a step to one side as he got opposite me, and whispered "Nice work if you can get it".

Soon the barge was away to the shrill of the Boatswain's Mate piping the Side, and I suddenly came awake to the fact that I should be on the starboard crane.

When I got back, I found the Killick of our party waiting for me. To tell me the Torpedo Officer, Lt.Cmdr. Pollock wanted to see me in his office as soon as I returned, at which I thought goodbye any chance of leave for tomorrow.

Away I went down to the Torpedo office, where the Chief TGI greeted me with, "your in the cart this time" and marched me in to the DO's office.

The DO. finished what he was doing, then looked up at me for a about a minute, then barked," When I did my rounds after lunch, you were absent from your place of duty on the starboard crane. Why?"

I explained that I had been piped to report to the OOW at the starboard after gangway, and on reporting, had been 'ordered' to escort a female visitor on a short tour of the upper decks, then return her to the gangway in an hour. Working on the rule of always obeying the last order, I had done so. With my fingers crossed, I said I had looked in our flight deck workshop to tell the Killick, but he was not there. He sat there for a few moments, then looked across at the Chief, and said, " What do you think, Chief, do you think we should give him leave tomorrow?" and started laughing. The word had been passed down the line, and they had been having me on. I was told to fill in a leave request for leave 1700 to 2359 the next day, and I did not need to find a sub. That was when I was told that the request had come from VA.Tysdale, and that I better not let the Torpedo branch down by getting drunk, or being late back on board, particularly as the ship was leaving at 0800 the next day.

I went up to the Port after gangway, the one on to the jetty, to request permission to use the ship to shore phone. I called EmiLou, and told her I had the leave, to which she replied that she was fairly sure I would get it, implying that she had been in on it, and told me that the car would pick me up 1700 , and would be available to fetch me back at 2330. The party would not start till 1900, but she thought I might like to visit , as she put it, a while before it started.

The next day seemed endless, taken up with ignoring the chattering about the Admiral's Daughter, most of which was quite good natured, though there were one or two who went over the edge, and had to be set straight. Including Dia Whyght, who wanted to know why I hadn't got hold of him while EmiLou was on board. He seemed to think that had I done so, he might have been given an invitation as well.

I was on the after gangway in good time, and the car was there on the dot. A naval car, driven by a seaman 1st class, as he told me when I asked, so we were about equivalent rank. I had a good audience as I got in the car, and we drove away to a cheer from the crowd of guardrail critics, lined up to offer me advice.

When we reached our destination, the driver parked the car, and told me to go to the front door, while he went round the back to the kitchen. However the front door was opened before I got there, and I was welcomed by EmiLou's Father, with a very cordial Happy Birthday, and a hearty come on in.

The house was not as palatial as their Chevy Chase home, but very up market compared to where I came from. EmiLou and her Mother were in what I presume was the lounge, and I greeted with two more Happy Birthdays and a kiss from each of them. The Mother was a slightly older version of EmiLou, like an older sister rather than her Mother.

Both Mother and Father were very easy to talk to, and asked a lot of questions about what I did and what my interests were. The Cmdr. was particularly amused that I considered myself a fourth generation, possibly fifth generation seaman serving in the Navy, rather than just a man dressed as a seaman.

Mrs. Hartley was more interested in life in Britain, and was most surprised when I told her I had not lived there since I was 15, apart from a few brief weeks on leave. I was able to give her some idea of the blackouts, air raids and the affect of rationing. EmiLou seemed more interested in what I read, and what my hobbies, if any, were, and when I said I dabbled in all kinds of handicraft, it was a good cue for me to give her the present. She was very gracious with her thanks, particularly when I said it was made from a piece of a broken windscreen from a Swordfish which had taken part in raids on the Norwegian coast.

Eventually the driver came and asked if he should get the car out, was told yes, and we were soon on our way to the party venue, a much bigger house, belonging to a friend of the Cmdr. It turned out to be fairly small party by their standards. About forty or so. Some male and female around EmiLou's age, some gold braid with their wives. It did not take me long to sort out that I was something of a novelty. They were all very polite, and curious as to what I did, and why I was there. The VA. was there for a while and had a chat with me for a couple of minutes. There was tons of food and drink, but I stuck to the odd soft drink, though some of the younger ones were starting to get a bit lively by the time I had to leave.

I found Cmdr. and Mrs. Hartley, thanked them for inviting me, and said goodbye to EmiLou, and wished her luck for her future. The car was at the door to take me back, and I can't say I was sorry to see the ship. The whole time since being called to the gangway the day before was unreal, and I wasn't sure whether I had enjoyed it or not.

But it was certainly an experience to be remembered, though it did take me quite a while to outlive the cracks about the 'Admiral's Daughter'.

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(I wrote to, and received several letters from EmiLou over the next couple of years, I received one while we were in Japanese waters shortly before the end of the war in which she told me her fiancé had been killed in a dog fight over Okinawa, just north of where we were operating, I answered, but that was the last letter I received from her)

We sailed at 0800 the next morning, Our time as part of the American Fleet over and we were on our way back, via the Panama to the Atlantic. The trip down and through the canal was a repetition of coming out. We had to take all the overhanging gun platforms off, not too hard when we were alongside in Panama but putting them back the other was not so easy, as we had to anchor in the bay off Balboa on the Atlantic end.

From there it was up through the Caribbean to Kingstown, Jamaica. A Fairy Tale harbour to look at, with all the different pastel coloured houses scattered up the low lying hills, among the tropical greenery. We must have been there four days, because each part of the watch had a run ashore, just from 1300 to 1700, as the town was not big enough to cope with too big an influx of visitors. Our own boats, two pinnaces and two cutters provided a shuttle service.

Like so many places, though, Kingston did not live up to its appearance as seen from the distance. Elegance along the main street, but behind that, tin shacks and even little huts built of palm fronds, with a high proportion of the populace on the starvation border line.

(It is not to be wondered at, that about ten years later the Jamaicans flooded in to Britain, when it was legally acknowledged that they were British citizens. The fatcat employers on the island lost a large part of their pool of nearly slave labour, but the influx into the British labour market was the cause of a serious slump in wages, particularly when they were followed by the Cypriots, Pakistanis, and Hindi.)

When we left Kinston on the last leg to home, we had on board about 300 of what were termed D.B.S. Distressed British Seamen, survivors off merchant ships that had been sunk, picked up by ships bound for Panama, and dropped off on the way past. Some of them had been there for over a year, including one who had been in my class at school. Dennis Luxton had been a deck hand on one of Reardon Smiths City Line ships which left Cardiff, in company with three other ships, and an escort of three Frigates

They were bound for San Francisco via the Panama. His ship was hit just before it reached the Historic Windward Passage, the old stamping ground of Captain Morgan and Blackbeard the Pirate. A straight; about 50 miles wide between Haiti and Cuba, and the most direct route to the Panama. He wasn't sure if it was a torpedo or loose mine. From his description of the damage, a big explosion under the bow, and the fact that the whole crew of 34 had time to make it to over the side on to the life rafts, I would think the later. Had it been a torpedo, or more usually; two, designed to explode under the ship's keel, she would have gone down a lot quicker. They were picked up by one of the frigate, and there not being enough room to keep them on board, they were put off in Kinston. He and most of the other survivors were very vocal about the treatment they received, or perhaps I should say, didn't receive at the hands of the authorities there. They had been treated very little above the scale of, for want of a better word, serfs. This despite that under the Law pertaining to D.B.S. the local Consul was bound to provide for their comfort and care, recouping the costs from HM Government.

It seemed strange that it had taken so long to repatriate them, but had to give the Jamaican authorities the benefit of the doubt when they said that nothing big enough to take them had been in to Kingston in the last year. But there did not seem to be any reason that they could have shipped home a few at a time.

We did know that Capt. McIntosh questioned most of the survivors individually, and that a detailed report was made to the Admiralty.

The passengers were accommodated in the recreation area, which was a large area right up forward, and immediately under the flight deck, where tombola was played, and the occasional film was shown under normal conditions. It was turned into part mess deck, part convalescent area for them, with a doctor and several sick bay artificers spending a fair part of each day up there with them.

Unfortunately no one thought to explain to them, that immediately above their heads was a giant steel windscreen, the full width of the flight deck, and nine feet high. This was raised by four monstrous hydraulic rams, working on pivots on the base of them. These rams were housed in the deckhead of the recreation area, and when they were operated it sounded like a bomb exploding.

Even old hands, sitting in the recreation room when these were operated without the warning which was supposed to be given over the public address system, but was often forgotten, had been known to jump out of their skins.

So it is no wonder that the passengers, already bundles of nerves from their past experiences, went berserk the first time it happened, without any warning. Racing around, out the door, some even tried to get out the scuttles. Apparently. It took quite a while, and a lot of talking to quiet them down, after which, we heard, the doctor went up to the bridge to say a few kind words to whoever was responsible for (not) broadcasting the warning. As well as the windscreen over the top of them, there was also the track of the Assisted Takeoff Gear, (ATG). This also made a devil of a noise when it operated.

Cmdr. (Flying), a real gentleman, went down personally to invite them to come on deck to see it working the next time it was in use, and to apologise for the scare they got from the windscreen operating. A couple of days later they were all up to watch a couple of Avengers being tossed in to the air.

Being back in dangerous waters we were now in the watch on, watch off, defense stations mode, and for the first time my defense, and action station was not on the upper deck, in the open. I had finished my stint on the Island / Flight deck, party and was now in the lower deck Ventilation / Fans party, which put me in the midships electrical damage control centre, with my station four decks down in the Low voltage generator room, (where the 200v DC ring main supply was broken down to lower voltages for various applications, Phones for instance only used 12v DC.). We carried out our normal routine of attending to malfunctions, but there always had to be at least half the party (14) there at any given time. A lot of our time while we were closed up was spent studying schematics and asking each other "what if" type of questions, which was a good way to work out what we would do in an emergency. We also took it in turns to have a bit of shut-eye, if things were quiet. We did have a couple of practice action stations on the way back, with care being taken to have some PO's up with the passengers to keep them from panicking. It was quite a trip, and we finally anchored in the Clyde off Greenock. in the late afternoon, somewhere early in October. The first job was to land the passengers. They were taken off in two drifters the next morning.

Then we took on some provisions. Just in time, as we had almost run out of the dried potatoes, and were about to re-adjust to the old fashioned kind, hoping the cooks still remembered what to do with them. Also it meant that each mess was responsible for peeling their own potatoes, and taking them up to the galley in a string net bag with a wooden tag on it bearing the mess number, to be pressure cooked high pressure steam in a large vat, and dished up with the rest of the meal, still in their string bag when the 'cooks of the mess', a grandiose name for the two ratings whose duty it was to collect the food for the twenty four (maximum ratings on each mess table, dish it out, make sure that meals were put in the hot box; there were two on each mess deck; for anyone who was on watch, or take it up to the sick bay for anyone who was sick. Then clean up afterwards. This for all three meals'. The cooks of the mess were rostered so that the duty came round about every eight days. They were piped to collect the food from the galley half hour before meal times, which were 0730, 1200, 1700, and allowed one hour after those times to clear up, before reporting to their place of duty. In actual fact, there was usually four or five other around to give them a hand with the clean-up. This was done quite willingly, because the thought was in your mind, it may be my turn tomorrow.

The main messdeck had 5 tables each side, separated by a double row of lockers, three high down the centre. The seamen were on the starboard side, and the stokers on the port, and the lucky ones had a locker on the mess deck. There were lockers tucked away in all sorts of odd corners. Every one had one, but some had a long way to go to get to theirs'. The seaman's mess deck was immediately below the hanger deck. Below it, reached via a water tight hatch in the deck, was the FAA personnel's mess. The hatch was about five feet square dogged down with steel clips on to a rubber seal. This was closed at all times while at sea, and the only access to that mess deck was through a smaller, oval hatch in the middle of the big one, 15inches by 20inches, (it did not pay to be fat) also dogged shut, but only with a single clip, and opened each time someone came up or went down. In the case of action stations being sounded, it automatically put the watertight integrity law in to force.

This meant that all spaces on or below the water line, as the FAA messdeck was; were battened down, and doors or hatches were only opened, for the passage of personnel. etc, with permission from the Damage Control Centre. One person stayed on the phone the whole time the hatch or bulkhead door was open, and reported as soon as it was closed. There were sound powered phones alongside every watertight opening for this purpose. The other branches were tucked away in other places, convenience and comfort were not a high priority in the RN.

It must have been about 10th October when we left the Clyde, bound for our home from home, Scapa Flow.

When we got round the north of Scotland, the whole day was taken up with cruising up and down the coast of Hoy, while the squadron were flown off three at a time at twenty minute intervals to the FAA base HMS Sparrowhawk at Hatson on the Island of Hoy. The time interval was to allow the three to land and get out of the way before the next lot came in. The aircrews had all their personal belongings with them, plus as much squadron gear as they could get on the plane. As was usual when they left a carrier or base, they did not know if they would be coming back to the same place. Any particular squadron could be shifted anywhere at any time. The long run of just on a year, from which we were just returning was most unusual.

When all the planes had departed we went on to The Flow, and made fast to our old buoy just aft of KGV. She looked as though she had not moved since we left for the States, And it was as though we had never been away.

The rest of the FAA personel had been busy packing their gear, and next morning brought it all up on to the flight deck, using the aircraft lifts. Later, using the cranes, it would be loaded on to a fleet of drifters, which would transport it and them to Kirkwall, and from there they would go by road to Hatson. But it never got that far, that order was belayed, and they were told to stow everything away again. The planes were coming back the next day, and we would be off again the day after.

(To digress, and go back a couple of years, to an episode brought to mind by the sight of the cliffs of Hoy. After being diverted to join the "Sink the Bismark' group, we picked up on the original plan; Operaton Tracer, to deliver the Hurricanes to Malta. With that completed, the beginning of July 1941 saw us back in Scapa, to finish the ship's and the squadron's working up routine. A lot of this was done in the area where we had just flown off the squadrons, alongside the rocky coast of Hoy. High and Low angle shoots with the 4.5" guns against drogues towed by aircraft, and raft targets towed by destroyers, steaming Paravanes, dropping and picking up lifeboats, and even a friendly submarine attack Hard work and plenty of it, but I still had time to see most of the magnificent rocky coast line, with some of the cliffs three to four hundred feet and more, straight up from the water (as measured by the 4.5 gun director, triangulating, using the inclinometer and the range finder). Some of the cliffs were home to hundreds, possibly thousands of Gannets. We were having a breather between exercises when a message from the bridge suggested that those who were free to do so come on to the upper deck to see an amazing sight. I was on the lower bridge, in my capacity of Commander's Messenger, so I had a good view.

The sea, which for a change was flat calm, was, for miles all round us, a bright iridescent blue. We were in the middle of a huge shoal of herrings, millions, if not billions. They were swimming with their backs just breaking the surface, hence the bright blue colour. We had just had our attention drawn to the herrings when the sky on the landward side, went black as clouds of gannets took to the air, and within minutes the sea was covered with little white water spouts as the gannets flew in, almost in formation, came down to about 30 feet, closed their wings and did a vertical dive, like an arrow in to the water. This went on for about twenty minutes, with the birds popping up like corks with a fish in their mouths, a quick swallow, up in the air again and presumably back in for more. It was impossible to keep track of any particular one. There were too many.

Then all of sudden it was over as though someone had called time. Whether the birds had had their fill, or the fish decided to go deep I don't know, but I know it was something I'll never forget.

I knew that in those days, herring fishing was a large part of the Island Economy, both catching them, and kippering them. Now they depend on tourists.

The Cardiff trawlers also used to go up to the herring grounds, and Dad had told me about the sightings of the huge shoals, almost, as he put it, thick enough to walk on. But it had to be seen to be believed.)

The FAA got their stuff stowed, no doubt bestowing a few kind wishes on the powers that be. But they were used to it. The spell they had just had of nearly a year was unusual. Normally they swapped around every two or three months.

The reason for the change in plans was that the Tirpitz was showing signs of movement, and we were sent, along with other units of the Home fleet to patrol the Norwegian coast, and make general nuisances of ourselves; with raids on coastal shipping, and to give Tirpitz the message. We got back to Scapa about the 20th of November, and over the next couple of days the squadrons and their personnel were really disembarked. And two days later we were on our way to Liverpool for a six week dry dock refit.

We had a good trip round to the Mersey, the weather behaved itself for a change, and soon we were outside the bar, just off the Formby light, taking on the pilot to guide us up the river. My first time here had been in the SS. Willowpool on our return from Montevideo, at the end of January 1940, when we had gone right through the ship canal to Manchester, and then the times when I went to and fro from the St. George on the Isle of Man. This time, though, we were headed for the Gladstone Drydock.

I had rotated my duties the previous month to start doing my four months as operator in the ship's telephone exchange, and on the day we arrived was just starting the forenoon watch, 0800 to 1230 down there, three decks below the water line, in the middle of the armored box, when we entered the river, so I was not able to be on deck to see us come over the notorious river bar.

This was always a sticky bit when entering the river, but it had been a great help in keeping submarines from slipping in, along with the anti-sub boom, for though it was a very wide river mouth, there was only a narrow deep water channel. However the minesweepers were kept busy clearing the channel of submarine laid mines. It was strongly suspected that some of the German submarines were operating from ports in the Irish Free State.

I came off watch just in time to see the tugs lining us up with the dock, and by the time I went back down below to the exchange for the first dog watch, we were secured, and the dock was starting to empty.

A few words about the telephone exchange, which was to prove to be my home from home for the next four or five weeks. It was a 240 line manual exchange, three panels of 80. The calls were answered by plugging in an answering cord and using a calling cord to connect to the required person or office. The jacks were not numbered, they had the title of the person or place they were connected to. As the caller ask for the person or place he wanted by name or title, so the operator had to memorise all the positions, and these were not even in alphabetical order. Rather some obscure system of seniority. If the incoming caller came up on the first panel, and the callee was on the third panel, one had to use panel connecting cords as the ordinary cords were not long enough. By the time there were thirty or forty calls connected it was like mad granny's knitting. It wasn't rocket science, but it took quite a while to get used to the layout of the lines. And more important; who got priority. During the forenoon and afternoon watch there were two operators, one of whom had completed three of his four months on this duty, and theoretically trained the new boy. We had a click counter on the panel, and were supposed to count and log the number of calls handled each watch, and a total for each day. It was not unusual, to log 6-700 calls a day. Even allowing for a bit of padding being done, it was a full time job, but I loved it., and after we were connected by three shore line to the Naval headquarters in the Liver Buildings it was even better. Their phones were manned by Wrens.

By the next morning, the dock was empty, and we were chocked up. This was the 4th December 1943, and one watch went on 14 days leave on the 5th.

This meant, in as much as it affected me, that the four exchange operators left on board would be working in pairs, watch and watch during the day, 0700-1500, and the two who did the forenoon, 0700-1230, split the night 1500-700, while the two that came off the afternoon could go ashore. That was the official version.

But we soon had quite a good set up. Being December, it was dark by 1630. The weather was bitterly cold, seemed worse than the Arctic, and a wet fog that came down every night. That, combined with the blackout, meant that you virtually had to feel your way in to the city, or make a beeline for the half dozen pubs outside the dock gates. Add to that the innumerable air raid warnings, mostly false, but you could never be sure, plus the fact that I had no interest in the pubs, it was no wonder I had no interest in going ashore.

By this time all the ship generated power, and with it the heating and ventilation was off, and we were connected to shore side power supply which could only give us about a third of what we normally used. Within a couple of days the ship was like an ice box.

So we rigged the switch boards with much a louder buzzer than the fitted ones, that could be switched in during the night. Flogged a heater from the electrical store, and jury rigged a little electric water heater to be able to make a cup of tea. With these, a couple of chairs, a watch coat, a bucket in case of necessity, it was fixed for the night, for just one operator to do the full night on his own. There was hardly any phone traffic after about 2000, and only a few calls during the rest of the night, usually between the Quartermasters on forward and after gangway.

I was quite happy to do most of the nights in the nice warm exchange, provided I was asked first, and not taken for granted. The Chief TGM said as long as the exchange was manned round the clock, he didn't want to know. Two of the other operators were from Liverpool, as was about a third of the ship's company. One was from Birkenhead, a ferry ride to the other side of the river, and the other from Aintree, the home of the world's premier steeplechase horse race, The Grand National. I went home with Reg Arthur a couple of nights, the one from Birkenhead, a very nice family, and the second night I went I met his sister Naomi, and found out I had already spoken to her several times. She was one of the Wren operators in the Liver building, or to give it its correct title, The Royal Liver Building. The main snag with going over there was that the last ferry was at 2330, and the next not till 0700, so we had to come back that night. After that, when Naomi was on night shift, I spent quite a bit of time talking to her, and was able to organise, through the good graces of the Torpedo Officer, for a party of the Wren operators to visit the ship for a look see.

They were strictly chaperoned, of course, by two Wren Officers, who somehow finished up in the Wardroom.

I kept in touch with Naomi, through a letter now and again right up to the end of the war.

The other watch came back on the 19th, and we went on leave 21st, so we got Christmas and the New Year. I went home, and for once the whole family, including Charlo, my eldest brother, were there, but due to the niggling friction between us all, I was not sorry to get back aboard on January 4th. With both watches now back on board, the watch keeping in the telephone exchange was not as cuddly as it had been, and we were back on straight one in four watches, with day work in the forenoon for those off watch.

While we were working part of the day, as well as the watch keeping. I was attached to the fan maintenance party, overhauling all the ventilation fans. I was glad I was no longer in the seaman branch, even though I was still technically one. A lot of them were down in the slush and mud at the bottom of the dock, scraping and painting the ships bottom with anti-fouling paint. In the bitter cold, and almost dark, they worked in pairs, one scraping and the other coming right behind applying the thick gooey paint, trying not to get any on themselves, because it was a devil of a job to get it off the skin. The idea was not to leave the metal exposed to the air, so that rust did not have time to bite in.

The ship itself was full of dockyard workers. All the Radar gear was being replaced with the latest, the torpedo room was being restored to take 18inch Whiteheads, the arrestor wires and crash barriers were being modified and renewed. Propeller shafts got new bearings, the steering gear had a complete overhaul. In other words, it was like living in bedlam.

And the worst part was yet to come. While I had been on leave, Capt. McIntosh had left the ship, and Cmdr. Surtees was leaving in a few days when he turned the ship over to the new Captain and Commander.

They were to be Captain M.M. Denny and Commander C.L. Ross

Denny was an ex-cruiser man, before making Commodore 1st Class and taking over a desk job at the Admiralty, and had dropped two grades to get command of Victorious, He had a stinking reputation in his old cruiser squadron as a strait laced, stern disciplinarian, with zero tolerance for human frailties. The son of an Irish Canon, he was a small man, and apparently suffered from the 'small man syndrome'. He was known throughout the cruisers as 'Mad Mike'.

He and the Commander came on board with full ceremony just before lunch, met on the gangway by Comdr. Surtees and an Armed Guard of Honour. Apparently he barely acknowledged the OOW. But Cmdr. Ross stooped to speak to him. It must have been to give him instruction, because within a few minutes, there was a pipe that was not heard very often. "all hands will clear the lower deck at 1500, and muster at the after end of the hanger. Rig of the day No3s". This meant everyone not on watch, had to change out of working rig, get dressed in blue uniform complete with collar, and be in the after end of the hanger by 1500.

At 1455, there was a reminder," all hands clear lower deck, Muster at the rear end of the hanger." Most of us were already up there, being marshalled in to order by the Master-at-Arms, and his staff (the ship's police force). Dead on 1500 he called us to attention, and the new Captain came in through the side door, and marched on to the aircraft lift, which was down. The MAA reported "lower deck cleared sir" and the lift was raised about four feet. So that we could all see him, and he could survey his 'minions'. He just stood there for a minute or so, then he made his speech. And I can remember it word for word.

" I am Capt. Denny, and I now command this ship. The purpose of this ship is to keep thirty-six aircraft in action, and I will do that if it costs me every man aboard. I expect top performance from all crew, and heavens help any man who fails to meet my standards. You have been warned"

The lift was lowered, and he strutted out, to be replaced by Cmdr. Ross. He introduced himself, then dropped another bombshell, when he said, " as from today, working dress will be No 3s, or No8s, (one piece boiler suits) if the work requires them. I do not want to see any more of these American jeans and shirts. they are more suited for the merchant service than the Royal Navy."

The after these two speeches the resentment could be felt all round and after the MAA had dismissed us, to return to work, the buzz of anger was thick enough to cut with a knife. The whole thing was like a slap in the face to all of us. We had given our best to two good Captains for two years, often under very trying conditions, and the ships performance had received commendations on several occasions. And the Admiralty had given permission to Capt. McIntosh for us to wear the American working rig to evaluate it for use in the RN.

We soon found out he meant what he said, he and his yes man Roly (as he became known because of his girth) Ross prowled the ship, followed by the MAA with a notebook, and anyone he saw doing something he deemed wrong, went on a charge. Just standing doing nothing was good enough for a charge of idling during working hours. At one stage there were about a quarter of the ship's company doing punishment of some kind or another.

When we finally got back to sea about the 10th of February, after nearly nine weeks in dry dock, not six as originally estimated, the interior of the ship was a mess. and he wanted it cleaned up and polished in a day. Crew working through the day and night, even those on defense watches, lookouts, gun crews etc, had to work polishing up their stations. It was a wonder that he did not order the Bluebell (metal Polish which had been put away at the beginning of the war. All brass work on the upper decks was painted over to stop sun reflections giving the ships position away.) brought back in to use. Moral was at a very low ebb, and by the time we got back to Scapa the tempers of some were really on the boil, particularly the jack of all trades seamen. Other branches were buffered a bit, but not completely, by their specialties.

Some of the crew had started a campaign of taking the Mickey, cartoons put in prominent places, nuisance phone calls to his cabin, etc. And when he publicly stated that he would find and exterminate these rats, someone made a cage with a dummy rat in it, and left it on the table in his day cabin. And when there was a small fire in one of the after lift motor rooms, (there were four, two each side, of the lift, synchronised to move it evenly). It was apparently a handful of cotton waste, smouldering, which set off the alarm. Whether it was done deliberately, or was the careless stubbing out a cigarette (shouldn't have been smoking there anyway) we never found out, but within the hour, Mad Mike was on the public address system, stating that when he found out who had done this dastardly (his word) act, he would have him charged with Sabotage under the War Crimes Act, and Hung. Some of the crew must have been in the know, or had a good idea, but nothing was ever said.

This was the atmosphere aboard when we finally got back to Scapa, and over the next week or so took on our new squadrons. The first of the new Barracuda Torpedo/ Dive Bomber/ Multi purpose planes had come into service earlier in the year, after have the bugs ironed out of them, and we had three squadrons in place of the Avengers that we had brought back from the States. We still had the 'Wildcats', though as from January 1st 1944, in the FAA they were officially known as 'Martletts'. (A rose by any other name is still a rose).

From the middle of February to near the end of March we were out every day working up the Squadrons, and in the last two weeks, exercises with three of the light fleet carriers that had come on line over the last year or so, specifically Searcher, Emperor, Pursuer, Fencer, and last but not least, the old girl herself, the Furious. A full dress rehearsal for Operation Tungsten, an all out attack on the Tirpitz, who was still skulking in Altenfjord, Norway.

By this time the atmosphere had just about reached fever heat. Mad Mike had done nothing to improve his image, in fact, had made it worse with his continual nitpicking, not only with the crew, but with the officers as well. What he apparently forgot was; a lot of the officers were well connected in the halls of power by family ties, and the old boy network. But his final and major mistake was trying to dress down Commander Flying, on the bridge, in front of the junior ratings who made up the bridge crew. Cmdr.(F) just turned and walked off the bridge, with MM at the top of his voice, threatening to have him court marshaled. All this, with many embroideries, was common gossip through the ship in short order, as was the news that just after we got back in, MM was summoned to the Duke of York for consultation with Ad. Jan Tovey, C. in C. Home Fleet.

What happened at that meeting, no one knows, but it was noticeably that; there after, apart from Captain' Rounds every Saturday morning, starting at 1100, his habit of prowling around the ship ceased. And later, even for Rounds, Roly Ross sometimes deputized for him. Things settled down and the air cleared a bit, but always there was that feeling that the powder keg could go up at any time, and the ship never had the same friendly atmosphere again.

(Some years later, I read Herman Wouk's book, 'The Caine Mutiny' based on his personal experiences on a destroyer during the war. And I could empathise with him. His description of Captain Queeg was very familiar.)

On March 24th we joined forces with HMS Duke of York (Ad.Tovey),HMS Anson, and HMS Furious, rear cover for convoy JW58. The convoy identification numbers had risen since we were last up there, but it was still just as cold. Fortunately. I no longer had to keep a watch in the ADP. My duties had rotated again and I was now in the lower deck fan party, with action stations, midships lower deck damage control.

On our way back down the coast, March 27th, we joined up with the four Escort Carriers, HMS Scorchers, HMS Striker, HMS Emperor, HMS Pursuer, four cruisers, and eleven destroyers. We were off to pay the Tirpitz a visit.

Code Named Operation Tungsten, it was slightly different to our first one, in 1941, when all we had was six Stringbags, and three Fulmars. This time we put up, between the six carriers, 51 Barracudas, some with 250 lb bombs some with torpedoes, escorted by 21 Corsairs and 20 Martletts, with an umbrella of another 40 Martletts. Fourteen direct hits were registered on the Tirpitz, with another 18 possibles or near misses. She would not be going anywhere for a while. This for a loss of three Barracudas, and one Marlett. The crews of two of the Barracudas were picked up by rescue destroyers.

Then between 21st April, and 6th May, The same gang but without the Duke of York; under V.Ad. Moore on the Anson, went back to have another go, but bad weather stopped any flying, on the 25th and 27th, but some strikes took off on 27th to attack a southbound German convoy. Three ships totaling 18000 ton were sunk and several more damaged, at the cost of six aircraft lost to AA fire and German fighters.

A month later, May 12th,to June 5th, we were back again, this time without the escort carriers.

HMS Anson (V.Ad. Moore)Victorious Furious, Pheobe ,Bermuda ,Belfast, Sheffield, and six destroyers. This time we hoped to finish the job. Just the threat of the Tirpitz sitting there had tied up a large amount of the British fleet for too long.

28 Barracudas, 28 Corsairs, 4 Seafires, and 4 Marlets were flown off on the 16th. but were forced to return due to low cloud in the narrow fjord.

There was another aborted attack with the same forces on the 26th. But this time the planes picked up a German convoy along the Norwegian coast, and were given permission to attack it. The Barracudas sunk one 10,000 ton ammunition ship, and left two others in flames. From there we went back to Scapa June 6th 1944. Barely had time to secure before we were off again. At this stage there was a surprising lack of rumours, all we knew was that we were going south, accompanied by the cruisers Pheobe and Kenya, and eight destroyers. It was not till we went through the Straights of Gibraltar, that we got the news that we were headed for the Indian Ocean. (a first for Victorious, the only ocean she had not sailed on so far), via the newly, partly opened Suez Canal. We were all on our toes going down the Mediterranean, particularly as we reached the vicinity of Malta, remembering the blood bath the last time we were in this neighborhood, but all was reasonable quite, apart from a few submarine alarms.

Finally we reached Port Said, having smelled it ten miles before we got there. The area around the entrance to the canal was a real ship's graveyard. A lot of the ships had been scuttled by the Egyptians to block the canal, and later, by German and Italian air attacks, even though Egypt was officially neutral, thereby denying both sides of the conflict access either way through the canal. There were also a lot of mines strewn around the area. Now special groups of Army, Navy, and Marine demolition experts were currently engaged in blowing the wrecks apart to clear a usable channel. And where possible, a small fleet of shallow draught boats were trying to clear up the mines.

At Port Said each ship had a forty inch anti-aircraft search light mounted on the bow. In our case it was on the forward end of the flight deck., and a canal pilot took over control on the bridge (I bet MM loved the idea of Arab in a nightshirt telling him what to do). This applied to all ships in the force.

We went through the canal in line. Half the destroyers, the Pheobe, then us, followed by Kenya and the rest of the destroyers, spread out in one mile intervals, so that if anyone was unlucky enough to find a mine, damage would be limited.

We left Port Said late afternoon, and continued through the night, hence the searchlights, Found out that the reason for going through at night was that it was too hot through the day, the temperature at mid-day in the middle of the canal could go as high as 160o.

The canal was 120 miles long, so to get through it before the sun got too high the next morning meant we had to maintain about eight knots. Any faster, and we would have washed the banks out. Even at that speed, due to our size, we were sending out quite a ripple. It must have been a fantastic sight, that line of lights creeping along through the desert. As it was, down below was like an oven, while on deck, where I and most of those that did not have a watch to keep, spent best part of the night watching the lights shining across the sand, and the desert going by, it was quite chilly.

By the time we dropped the pilots and the searchlights off at Suez, we were beginning to get a taste of what was to come as we went down through the Red Sea. Even when we got up to our cruising speed, and were getting a bit of breeze over the deck, it was like going into an oven on full blast, just to step out on the flight deck. Luckily for the flight deck crew, all flying was suspended for the next two days.

Even so, it was not very funny down below, and the fan party were kept busy repairing fans that gave out because they were going flat out 24 hrs a day. Mostly brushes wearing out. But some of the motors burnt out and had to be replaced. At one stage the temperature on the mess deck was 110o.

It took us about two days to get through the Red Sea, then around the corner, calling at Aden, into the Gulf of Aden, though to the Gulf of Omam, then out into the more open Arabian Sea. We were supposed to carry on down though the Indian Ocean to Colombo in Ceylon, but due to a recurring problem with our steering gear, we were diverted to go in to Dry dock in Bombay 6th June -5th July

This was now about the end of May. On May 14th? SS Stikine, carrying a mixed cargo of cotton bales, gold, ammunition, including 1.400tons of explosive, caught fire, in Bombay, and was destroyed in to gigantic blasts scattering debris over a five mile radius, sinking surrounding ships and killing 800 people.

The dry dock, when we went in, looked a bit the worse for wear, with the surrounding area looked like the aftermath of a full scale air strike. And this was after nearly a month of cleaning up.

There was no shore leave as such, but as it was estimated that we would be in dock for about fifteen day, but it had been arranged through the Bombay RN Shore Station HMS Braganza, that each part of watch, i.e. one quarter of the crew at a time would be bussed to an under canvas camp at a place on the coast about ten miles out of Bombay called Kalaba, for two nights R&R. This was where a lot of the fat cats Europeans had holiday houses, and was also the site of the Willesden Country club and Golf course, the Crème de la Crème of white supremacy. I was one of the 'lucky' ones chosen by a draw, to visit the club for elevens and lunch on the second day at the camp. (this was done for each of the four groups).Talk about a lot of toffee nosed, condescending erks. They thought they were doing their bit for the Empire by inviting us. It was hard work restraining the urge to supply them with a few of the facts of life.

Apart from that, my main memory was of the Char Wallah with his big urn of tea, and a stick with a dozen or so cups threaded on it by the handles. He came to the tent each morning. Supplied tea at 2 pi (100 pi to the rupee, 15 rupee to the pound), not very expensive, to those who wanted it, while his off sider stood outside with a big box of clean cups. When he had visited all the tents, he came back to the beginning and collected the cups. He came back round again at mid morning, this time with two off siders, one with the cups, and the other with a tray of little, very sweet, cakes made of sugar and shredded coconut. They sold like the proverbial hotcakes. The other memory was of the thousands of little green frogs along the banks of the stream that ran down one side of the campsite. Some one had the bright idea of catching a heap of them and turning them loose in the tent occupied by the three CPOs who were with us. From some where a box about eighteen inches square and a foot deep was found, the hunt was on and with plenty of willing hunters it was not long before the box was full.

That afternoon, while the CPOs were visiting some army types further along, who had a more lavish camp than us, including a canteen, the box was placed in the middle of their tent, upside down, so that when it was picked up, the flaps would drop open and spill the frog out. A lookout was kept so that we had time to gather in the adjacent tents to hear the results. The language was both loud and explicit. But being good sports, they enjoyed the joke, though they did press gang the first four people they caught to clear their tent of live stock. Then the next day it was back to the ship to let the next lot away.

When we got back, we found that permission had been given for anyone not in the duty part of watch to volunteer for cleanup work, in the immediate vicinity of the ship. Although the explosion was caused by an accident. (at least, it was never proved otherwise, although the free India fanatics were quite strong in Bombay at that time), it gave us a very hands on picture of the results when things go bang. Needless to say, security was extra tight. Every workman had someone looking over his shoulder the whole time he was on board. It was seven months before the dockyard was back to normal.

Six days later we were on our way, straight down this time, to Colombo, where we stayed for four days before we were away again. While we were there the local police, which consisted of a mixture of Singalese and Europeans; through the Chief PTI, who had spent the evening, along with numerous other Chiefs, at the police club, issued a challenge to a game of Water Polo, to take place the next afternoon in the pool at the Galle Face Hotel, which was to Colombo what the Raffles is to Singapore.

The next morning all ex-boys were mustered outside the MAA office, where the Chief PTI also had a desk, and a water polo team was selected on a you,you,and you basis. He knew that water polo was compulsory at the St. George, having been one of the instructors there. I was one of the 'lucky' ones. Not that I minded, I was a fairly strong swimmer, and I had enjoyed the odd game since. Particularly when we were in Pearl Harbour.

The team, under the chaperonage of said Chief PTI, was granted leave from 1300 -1700. We went ashore in the cutter, a police wagon met us on the pier, and away we went to the Galle Face, which proved to be another Willesdon Club, but not quite so toffee-nosed. There was a fair number of spectators lounging in deck chairs around the pool, enjoying their sundowners,

The game eventually started, and we could see straight away we were in for a hammering. Most of our team were fairly good, including one, Flossie Jamison, who had broken the British schoolboy 100yards freestyle record in 1939 at the age of 13. But compared to us, the other team, all Singalese, were like fish, as was to be expected, as the kids there spent more time in the water than they did on land. From memory, the final score was about forty eight to five. But we had a good afternoon, finishing off with a slap up tea in the hotel dining room,

The next move was right around to the other side of Ceylon to Trincomalee, a big natural harbour, where a very make shift naval base, HMS Bambara, and a naval hospital had been re-established. In use during WW1, it had been mothballed in the 1920s and left to go to ruins. It was a lovely looking place. A huge open bay with sandy beaches all round. The forest coming right down to the beach, with huts back in the trees, and fishing boats like canoes pulled up on the sand. That is, apart from the comparatively small clear area on the other side of the bay where the township, and the Naval hospital was situated. Also in the bay was a large floating dry dock R23, big enough to take a Battleship. This had been saved from the rape of Singapore and towed to Trinco, surviving several air attacks on the way.

There was no shore leave, the small township would not have been able to handle the numbers. Swimming was permitted for one hour 1700 to 1800. In the vicinity of the port forward boom where the two motor pinnaces were secured, and could be used as diving platforms, and one of the motor cutter stood off and watched in case of accidents.

After our poor showing in Colombo, some of us practised water polo, but we never got a rematch. Another form of relaxation was to form a whaler's crew, One Leading seaman and six other ratings, of whom at least two had to be seaman branch, for which I qualified, as my substantive rank was still seaman. We would book a sailing whaler, (we carried two) with the Chief Bs'n.Mate, scrounge a picnic meal from the cooks, and go sailing. I did this quite a few times, and got to see some of the shore line. Run the whaler up on the beach, having dropped a stern anchor a hundred or yards out so we had something to haul ourselves out with if we got stuck a bit tight on the sand. The forest came down to within fifty yards or so from the water. It was too dense to venture very far in to it, plus we had been warned of the danger from snakes, so we just set up our picnic on the edge of the trees, and within ten or fifteen minutes there would be a troop of noisy, and I mean noisy, monkeys bouncing around over our heads. The forest was full of them, and even at night out on the water you could hear them screaming and booming. On one of our outings we went right to the entry of the bay, and watched some of the locals setting their nets, fish being their staple diet, and means of income.

We had it very quiet for a couple of weeks, just two days out flying and fleet exercises, which brought us to July 22nd.

Then in company with:-

Battle Ships:- Queen Elizabeth (Ad. Somerville) Valiant, Renown(V.Ad.Powers) Richelieu, (Strictly speaking, these four were Battle Cruisers)

Cruisers:- Cumberland, Nigeria, Kenya, Ceylon, Gambia, Tromp

Destroyers :- Seven

These were designated The Battle Fleet

Carriers :- Illustrious (V.Ad. Moody) Victorious

Cruiser :- Pheobe,

Destroyers :- Four

Operation Crimson

The carrier force attacked the airfield at Sabang, using 34 Corsairs, then the Battle Fleet closed in to bombard shore installations. On this occasion the Japanese were taken by surprise and only two aircraft were lost, with one crew being picked up by the Illustrious's rescue Walrus.

Back in Trinco on July 28th. And another quiet spell. We were only keeping harbour defense watches, one watch in eight, Just lookouts in the ADP, two PomPoms either side, and the motor boat patrolling round the ship, armed with anti personel under-water charges, in radio contact with the Asdic operator who was also closed up to keep an under water listening watch.

With four Destroyers stationed in the harbour entrance on a static anti-submarine watch there was not much chance of anything getting in that way, but it would just be possible for Frogmen to land up the coast and come in over land. Our frogmen did it in Europe and Singapore, so there was no reason not to expect it from the Japanese, but all was quite till the wee hours of the morning of August 8th, when we came alive in a hurry to the sound of General alert, all hands to action stations. At first we had no idea what was going on, but the word soon spread from those up top that the whole fleet was closed up, and jumping at shadows. Towards morning more information started trickling down. The action was centred on AFD 23. the floating dock. When we came back from Op. Crimsom, the Valiant had shown need for bottom scraping,

She also needed some work on a minor bump she had received in an argument with the QE.

Having read the details of the enquiry, many years later, thanks to the internet. it seemed that for some, unknown reason, the buoyancy tanks of the dry-dock were being emptied in the wrong order, without taking the weight distribution of the Valiant into account. With a full load of armament, she had most of her weight concentrated amidships, and this caused the dock to break its back. Valiant still had steam up and managed to get clear, but not without severe damage to her stern and steering gear. She never saw active service again.

But at the time, with nobody really knowing what had happened, the whole fleet went to first-degree readiness, with motor launches from each ship, circling the ships, dropping anti-personnel charges at irregular intervals. But by the end of the day, things had returned to as near normal as they ever got.

August 16th –28th

Carriers:- Victorious (R.Ad. Moody), Indomitable.

Cruisers:- Pheobe, Kenya.

Destroyers:- 5

Operation Banquet.

Raids on airfields at Padang. S.W. Sumatra

This time the Japanese were more alert, and we lost 7 plane to very effective AA fire, but claimed 21 Japanese planes destroyed on the ground.

Another spell to replace planes and refuel, and a week or so of filling in time, a few more swims and whaler trips before the next outing.

September 16th-23th.

Battleship:- Howe (V.Ad.Powers).

Carriers:- Victorious (R.Ad. Moody),Indomitable,

Cruisers:- Cumberland, Kenya.

Destroyers:- Racehorse, Raider,Rapid, Redoubt,Relentless,Rocket, Rotherham.

Operation Light.

Air raids on airfields and oil installations on Sigli, Nth Sumatra. And reconnaissance raids on the Nicobar Islands. No casualties this time.

Back to Trinco for another wind down before the next operation. We seemed to be spacing them out one a month. And the FAA were doing the hard yards, while the ship's crew were getting a relatively easy run.

October 15th-19th,

Carriers:- Victorious (R.Ad. Moody), Indomitable.

Cruiser:- Pheobe. Destroyers:- Whelp, Wakefull, Wessek, Wager.

Now designated TC63-3 of the British Pacific Fleet.

Operation Millet.

A diversion for the U.S. landings on Leyte. Bombing and strafing attacks on the Nicobar Islands. The Japanese responded with an attack by twelve Torpedo bombers. Of which seven were shot down by our fighter cover. The other five departed, with no damage to the ships, but having shot down three of our planes. All of our airmen were picked up by destroyers, but two were badly injured.

Back to Trinco, but on October 22nd we left for Bombay. Our steering gear and propeller shaft bearing were playing up again, so we were going back in to dry-dock, where we arrived on October 25th.

Just before we reached Bombay, the Squadrons flew off to the RAF/FAA station, I think it was called Santa Cruz, just inland from Bombay.

The maintenance crew were bussed out to the air station, but they did not take all their gear with them as they usually did, because they knew that on this occasion the same squadrons would be coming back.

This time each watch were to get four days at the frog farm at Kalaba. I went with the 2nd watch. We left on morning of the day after the other watch returned, which was 31st, and found that the camp had been extended and much improved. It was nearly as good as the Army camp, including a well endowed Canteen. Theoretically limited to two cans of beer per person per day, but run on the same lines as all the NAAFI canteens, it was easy for anyone who wanted more to get extra coupons. I swapped mine for the cost of a supply of the little, sweet, coconut cakes. Unfortunately by the end of the four days, I was not feeling so hot. I had a swelling the size of an egg in the left armpit, and it was murder to use the arm, or lay on that side. We had a Sick bay Tiffy with us who was responsible for our 'well being'; if you could find him, and he said it looked like an abscess, and for me to report to sick bay as soon as I got aboard. This I did, the Doctor diagnosed an Auxilla Abscess, said that it was not yet ready for lancing, and that he would make arrangements for me to be transferred to the Naval hospital the next morning. I was to go and let my Divisional Office know that I could be in hospital five or six days, to pack my toilet gear, and be at the sick bay at 0830, November 5th. This I duly did and at 1100 I eventually left the ship in an ambulance, which I think had been left over from the Indian Mutiny. The hospital, though was not bad. Twenty beds and only three patients, with a male nurse and four female nurses on each shift, so we did not lack for care.

Life was a bit of a doddle for the next four days. The Doctor checked my bump each morning, pronounced that it was not ready to open yet, and apart from the pain, which was not too bad now I was getting regular pain killers, I was more or less free to do what I wanted.

With the connivance of the nurses, I teamed up for a couple of afternoons at the races with one of the other patients, also a walking wounded, Reg Pavitt, a Telegraphist, from the East end of London, shore based at HMS Braganza. He had a badly broken right wrist and was worried that it would affect his ability to use a sending key. He had been stationed in Bombay for four months, and knew his way around. And we both had beginners luck. I cleared just over 300 Rupees for the two days. (Twenty Pound)

On the fourth day, it was decided that the abscess would be opened up that afternoon, and I was duly put out and the job done. I was a bit groggy for the rest of the day, but the next morning, it was a lot easier, so the following day, the sixth, I started making noises about going back aboard. The Doctor aboard had stipulated six days, and I had no idea how much longer the ship would be here. As it was, It was on the afternoon of the eighth day, with my arm still in a sling that I was transported back to the Vic. Just in time, I found my kit bag and hammock had been packed ready to be sent to the Branganza if I wasn't back aboard before her scheduled sailing time of 0700 on the 14th.

I was on light duties, for the second time in my far from illustrious career, and I spent the next seven days as a gofer in the Torpedo Divisional Office.

The squadron crews were back aboard, and we spent most of the 14th, just off from Bombay, flying on the planes, and at the same time carrying out some high speed manoeuvres, to test the steering gear.

Continued with flying exercises on the way back, arriving in Trincomalee, November 19th. We missed taking part in Operation Robson Then, on the 22nd we received re-inforcement. Our force now consisted of:-

Battleships;- King George V (V.Ad. Rawlings) Howe

Carriers :- Indefatigable (R.Ad. Vian) Illustrious, Indomitable, Victorious.

Cruisers:- Swiftsure, Argonaut, Black Prince, Newfoundland, Gambia,

Destroyers;- 3 Flotillas 4th 'Q's, 25th 'U's, 27th 'W's.

Admiral Bruce Fraser as C-in-C. We were henceforth to be known as the "British Pacific Fleet"

We spent a lot of the next six weeks on exercises, particularly inter-carrier flying. Between the four carrier we had a merry mixture of planes, Avengers, Corsairs, Barracudas, Martletts, Fireflies, and Sea fires, all swapping to and fro between carriers as practice for the air crews and the flight deck parties, Needless to say, we finished up with a few bent planes. But replacements were available to bring us all back up strength, via two escort carriers, Pursuer and Fencer, whose sole job was to carry spare aircraft for the fleet carriers, and the aircraft maintenance carrier Pioneer, a floating workshop devoted to getting aircraft back in the air in the shortest possible time. A far cry from the early days, when, if an aircraft had more than a couple of scratches, it was pushed over the side, and you made do with an ever diminishing force.

January 16th- February 4th 1945.

Battleship:- King George V (V.Ad. Rawlingson)

Carriers:- Indomitable (R.Ad. Vian), Illustrious, Indefatigable. Victorious.

(It was well known that R.AD. Vian of the Cossack, would not use Victorious as flag ship, after a real bust with Denny when he was Commodore cruisers)

Cruisers:- Argonaut, Black Prince, Euryalus.

Destroyers:-Grenville, Kemperfelt, Undine, Ursa, Undaunted, Wakeful, Wager, Whirlwind, Whelp.

Operation Meridian.

0800 January 24th 46 Avengers, 12 Fireflies, and a mixture of 50 Martlets, Seafires, and Corsairs, took off after 2 days of very bad weather, to attack Oil refineries at Palembang in Sumatra, 150 miles inland from the Indian Ocean. As well as extensive damage to the refineries, 52 Japanese aircraft were destroyed, 14 in the air, and 38 on the ground. We lost 7 planes to the Japanese, no crews recovered, and 25 in deck landing crashes. The weather had turned really dirty during the time of the raid, and by the time the planes started returning we were in the middle of a force 8 gale. The planes by this time did not have a lot of petrol reserve, and some had to land on which ever carrier had it's deck free at the time. It was learned later that nine of the missing air crew were executed by the Japanese

January 26th and 27th More attacks on oil refineries and airfield at Palembang and Soengi-Gerong, resulted in another 68 Japanese aircraft destroyed, 30 in the air, and 38 on the ground. Some of the planes on the ground were a bit doubtful, as the Japanese were known to range dummy planes among genuine one on the ground, We lost 16 of our planes, but some of the crews were picked up.

Apparently, the reason for at least some of our losses was over enthusiasm on the part of some of the pilots in detaching to take part in individual combat.

29th Fleet refuelled at sea from tankers, Echodale, Wave King, and Empire Salvage. Weather was still a bit lumpy, but the fact that the RN had now adopted the American method of oiling made the transaction both easier and quicker. An attack by 12 Torpedo Bombers was broken up and they were all shot down by fighters from Indomitable and Victorious, who were providing the Canopy while the other two carriers were oiling.

We did not return to Trincomalee, but carried on to Fremantle, Australia. Arriving, on February 4th, those of us that could fit, went into the river Swann, to a rousing welcome, from the local populace

(In the meantime orders had been received from My Lords of the Admiralty which I'm sure made the day for our illustrious Captain and his Roly Poly off sider. The American working rig of blue jean trousers and blue demin shirts would hence forth be the official working rig for all ratings in the BPF. Arrangements were in hand to provide a free issue of two sets to all hands. Most of the Victorious's ratings still had theirs, so they could start wearing them straightaway, and soon MM had a full crew of men disguised as Merchant Seamen.)

All the ships, on arrival, were presented with dozens of boxes of Purple Grapes The grapes were packed in granulated cork. Unfortunately, the cork in turn, were packed with little red spider mites, and it wasn't long before the mess decks, and apparently the Gunner's Mess and the Wardroom, were festooned with spider webs, for many months to come. Where was the M.A.F. when they were wanted. We did not know it at the time, but just over two weeks earlier, January 17th, Fremantle came very close to a major disaster. Two ships MV Panamanian, and the submarine mother ship, HMS Maidstone were at the dock; the Maidstone's bow to the MV's stern. Some hessian sacking on the MV's bows caught fire, and was thrown over the side. This set fire to some petrol and oil on the surface of the water, and within a short space of time the MV was ablaze from bow to stern. The flames jumped to the Maidstone, and she was alight from bow to the bridge by the time she was towed away into mid-river, and the flames were brought under control, thanks to some quick work by HMNZS Achilles, who was just coming into the port at the time and so, was still under way. Apart from her own armament, the Maidstone carried supplies for the submarines she serviced, and at that time had onboard 120 torpedoes, 80 mines, and various other hoards of ammunition. Had she continued to burn and those supplies exploded; every thing within five or six miles would have been flattened.

Two days, and we were on our way to Sydney, but on the way, Victorious came head to head with something that a lot of people maintained was figment of the old sailors imagination. A Rogue or Freak wave. We were in the middle of the great Australian bight, having turned out of formation to fly off relief air patrol and land on the relieved patrol, cruising nicely at flying on/off speed, about 23-24 knots when we hit a rock. At least that was what it felt like.

The story, as I got it later, having been on watch in the bowels of the ship in the telephone exchange, with another ST, Les Burrow, for obvious reasons, known as Rabbit

We had finished the change over of patrol planes, the weather was reasonable, and the windscreen (referred to in the incident when we brought the D.B.Sailors back from Kingston) was up while the just landed planes were struck down the forward hatch. We had turned to catch up with the rest of the fleet, along with our two screening destroyers, each about a mile away, one off each bow, and our Tailend Charlie, the cruiser Gambia.about 1000 yards astern. Down in the exchange we were both thrown off our feet, and our first thought was 'torpedo', what do we do? Then the exchange went mad, as nearly every light on the board lit up. But there was a drill for this eventuality, and we had a definite sequence of priorities as to the order in which they were answered. It also gave us something to do.

We were kept too busy to worry about what it was. Within minutes we felt the ship pick up speed again and then there was a re-assurance over the tanoy that it was not, repeat not an attack, but a freak of nature. While the rest of the sea was relatively calm, we had run into a wave between 30 and 40 feet high, which had apparently appeared out of nowhere. It was obviously very localised, as the two destroyers had passed one each side of it, And Gambia was right up on our quarter by the time we had picked up speed, and she suffered no ill effects. Luckily the tail end Charlie always travelled a bit to one side or the other, not directly astern, otherwise she would have been up our stern. It is only a matter of a minute to close a gap of 1000 yds. at 23 knts, and ships do not have brakes. Damage control was still checking, but it appeared the main damage was to the overhang over the Forecastle, and parts of the windscreen. And about, so far, forty plus personal injuries, including a fair number of broken limbs. The ship's company should carry on as usual until further orders. By the time the broadcast was finished, most of the lights on the board had gone out, so Rabbit and I wiped our brows and made a drink, using the electric kettle that still survived from our days in Liverpool.

(These freak waves, or stories about them, had been around as long as there has been ships. It is believed that they were the mythical seabeasts that reared up out of the ocean and seized so many early ships. While little was known about them in 1945, they are now well documented and researched).

All this I heard when I came off watch, and those who had been eye witnesses, the gun crews of S1 and P1 PomPoms in particular, safe from being washed away in the PomPom enclosure, but not safe from the deluge that landed on them, were very vocal about their unexpected shower. They were the only ones on deck at the time, the flight deck crew were below, and the forward lift was up. All in all the ship displayed its usual luck. Five minutes earlier, and it would have wiped the deck clear of planes, and half filled the Hanger as the lift would have been down. But one of the FAA photographers who were always on the wing bridge and photographed every landing, had turned forward just as the wave broke; in perfect time to record the event.

We carried on, rejoined the fleet, and the Engineering and Medical Divisions started to assess the damage. The damage to the forecastle overhang was superficial, just a few buckled plates, and the damage to the windscreen could be fixed, with our own resources before we reached Sydney. That put paid to our hopes of a spell in dock when we got there.

As it was we did get a break, We arrived in Sydney February 10th and we secured alongside what turned out to be a ferry wharf; used for servicing Taronga Park Zoo. Shore leave was given to the non -duty watch, from 1300 – 2300, using the same ferrys, of which there were two. They worked one each way and could take about half a watch at a time, so that the liberty men had a kind of a shuttle service, which was just as well, because with two Battleships, four Fleet Carriers, two Escort Carriers, one Aircraft Maintenance Carrier, Five Cruisers, and twenty two Destroyers, there were more than a few Matelots on the town.

I was on duty in the telephone exchange, and as in Liverpool, we were hooked up to the Naval HQ. I had made the same arrangements with the other operators as I had in Liverpool. At that time I was not sufficiently interested in fighting my way ashore to worry about taking leave. Though that did change later. As a watch keeper, I was free to go ashore in the afternoons, and I spent a couple of pleasant afternoons in the Zoo.

I had similar contact with the shore operators as I'd had in Liverpool. and spent quite a bit of time on the night shift talking to them. The ship had been opened to small parties of visitors (no more than eight at a time), vouched for by various firms in the city, so I suggested that the telephone operators from Naval HQ apply for a turn. This was granted, and arrangements made for them to arrive at the Zoo wharf at 1330, on, from memory, February 13th. I know it was a Tuesday because we had been paid that morning, 5 Australian Pounds, for 4 English, and for a change I had some money in my pocket. As they were all telephone operators, what more natural than having the ship's operators showing them round, and what more natural than Rabbit and I; volunteering as guides.

We had a very pleasant afternoon. The party consisted of six female, and two male operators, the female operators not allowed to do a night shift unless they had at least one male with them. We split them into two threes plus one, and went off in opposite directions, They were all mature people, some more mature than others, and I had one female in my four who; at about thirty, seemed to be the youngest, and the one who asked the most questions. All of which I answered, though I confess that one or two had me improvising. They were particularly interested on the state of affairs at home, but as I had not been home for quite a while, I had to be a bit vague.

When we were all back on the wharf, having a general chat, the youngest one asked if I would care to visit her home for a meal, and to meet her family, who she was sure would be interested in talking to me. Having had one episode where an invitation to a meal in Pearl Harbour had turned into an attempt to save my soul, I was a bit hesitant, particularly as I'd got the impression she was rather religious, but in the end I made arrangement to meet her on Woolloomooloo Wharf (She gave me the spelling which was apparently the original spelling) the next afternoon, Wednesday, at 1400. It was her day off. I would have no problems changing my watches, as most of the other operators owed me time.

Her name was Patricia (call me Pat), She duly met me at the ferry wharf, and the first thing we did was to visit a café at the end of the pier, where we both had a milk shake, which were nearly big enough to swim in, and I had two chocolate and cream donuts, I actually bought one each, but Pat didn't want her's on the grounds that they were fattening. One of the main things I remember about that first visit to Sydney, was the food, and how ridiculously cheap it was.

We just sat and talked for a while, I provided the main details of my family, and she did the same with hers, She was 31, the eldest of five, one sister two years younger, and three brothers descending in two year steps. The sister was a nurse, Dad and the brothers were all working in the dockyard, and were therefore exempt from call up to the armed services, but the two younger ones were making noises about joining the Navy, which was one reason for the invitation to tea, so they could quiz me about service conditions. Pat herself had been working in a solicitor's office, but took the job of night shift telephonist in the Naval HQ to do something towards the war effort. She also did volunteer work, several hours a day, at the hospital where her sister worked,

Having sorted all that out, she asked what I would like to do till we caught the train for the ten minute trip to her home. I said I liked poking round museums or any points of historical interest. It seemed that she had similar tastes, so that was what we did. We spent a pleasant couple of hours, and eventually arrived at a station, Wynyard, that I came to know well in later days. I even learned it was pronounced Winard.

After the ten minute train ride, and a ten minute walk, we arrived in her street and I stopped in surprise. I could have been in Wells Street were we lived in Cardiff.

A row of red brick terraced houses, of the type known at home as two up, two down, with a tiny front area enclosed by a two-foot high brick wall surmounted by a small wrought iron fence.

Pat asked me what was the matter, and when I told her that the house were a replica of ours at home, even to the slate roofs, she told me that the style was common in some of the older suburbs. However when I got inside, there was a decided difference. She told her Mother about about the way I had been struck by the similarity of the outside, so she insisted I had a tour to see how the inside compared. Their's was much more modern, higher ceilings and much deeper, than ours, three rooms up, plus a full bathroom. And three down plus a proper kitchen, also the floors were wood, not stone slabs like ours. Add a big garden, and it was really only the front that was familiar.

Then Dad and the boys came in from work. They all worked in the same part of the dockyard so arrived home together. They were all fairly large, and suddenly the house was full of bodies and noise, with them greeting me and asking questions. In the end Mum told them to shut up, get washed, then sit down for tea. It wasn't hard to see who was boss in that house.

My thoughts, that Pat might be a bit religiously inclined were confirmed when we sat down at the table, and Dad asked if I had any objections to him saying Grace. Of course I said no, and after a fairly long Grace being said, which included welcoming me, we were served with a very full meal, particularly the amount of meat consumed, but I got the impression that it was their normal fare, and not anything special put on for me.

After the meal, Dad, the boys and I went in to the "sitting' room while Mum and Pat cleared away. It was noticeable that they were not offered any help, but I found out later that was the norm in Australia. We had quite a chat, during which I found out that both Mum and Dad were second generation Irish Australians from County Cork, and it was obvious from the photos and figurines etc, in the room that they were fairly staunch Roman Catholics, not that it made any difference to me. The eldest brother went out shortly after, and then the two youngest got stuck into the questions about life in the Navy. I don't know if it was my answers or not, but I was to find out at a later date that they had given that idea away.

After a pleasant evening, during which I was invited to what I later found out was an Australian institution, a Sunday Barbie, which I accepted, even though I had no idea what it was, I had to leave to catch the train, the last one being just before 2200, which gave me plenty of time to get back on board on the 2300 ferry, although as a watchkeeper I had till 1100 the next day. Pat and her youngest brother walked down to the station with me, not in the sense that he was a chaperon, At least, I didn't think that was the idea, but because it was apparently a recognised thing in the family that one of the brothers escorted either of the girls to the train after dark, or went to meet them if they came home after dark, and as the younger sister would be coming home from work at the hospital on a train that got in just after mine left, they were killing two birds with one stone. So I did not get to meet her till the mysterious barbie on Sunday.

I got back aboard in plenty of time, and the next day, swopped a few watches around so that I could get Watchkeeper's leave, 1300 Sunday to 1100 Monday.

Working four parts of the watch as we were, those who had the forenoon watch. 0800 – 1230, was entitled to take leave from 1300, (which just gave you time to change), till 1100 the next day. As we had to catch the ferry to get to the city we were tied to the ferry times, whereas had we been in dock or one of the city wharfs, and not dependant on the ferry, I could, with the OOW's permission, walk off at any time. The ferries were chartered and did not cost us anything.

I did a couple of extra watches so that I could get some peace and quiet down in the exchange, and spoke to Pat on the land line on a couple of occasions, including getting detailed directions to get to her place. She wanted to come in to meet me but she was working the Sunday night starting at 2000, and it seemed silly for her to come in twice. So we arranged that I would find my own way out, and come back in with her in the evening.

I had been told that there was a place at the harbour end of George Street, which catered for service men, where you could book a bed for sixpence a night, and breakfast for another sixpence, but you had to be in early, especially with the numbers of ships that were in harbour. I thought I might be able to book one if I went straight from the ferry. I had to go that way anyway to get to 'Winard' station. If I wasn't lucky, I could get one of the earlier ferries back to the ship.

I got to Pat's house about 1430, having booked my bed. I was made welcome, the Ladies, including Pat's younger sister, were in the kitchen being busy, and I was sort of introduced to them on my way through to the Garden, where the 'Barbie had just started, but I was not given much chance to linger. And then I was initiated into what was apparently one of the major weekend pastimes of the Australian male, and the only time they do any cooking.

There were several other visitors, and they were all standing around, all holding glasses or bottles, gazing intently at what appeared to be a metal trough on legs, full of hot cinders, which I later learnt was charcoal, covered with a metal grill, which in turn, was covered with all sorts of small pieces of meat, sausages, and fish. And there they were, the temperature in the high eighties, standing round an open fire, watching pieces of meat char. I wasn't sure whether it was meal being prepared, or a religious rite, or perhaps a bit of both.

I was pulled into the circle and given a drink, of beer, of which I am not fond. I made it last as long as I could, and then asked for a soft drink. I was looked at as though I was mad, but given what I asked for. A lot of the questions that I fielded. were about action in the Pacific, so I had to point out we got less news than they did. We only knew about our own little sphere of action, and only then what we could gather over the rumour network. The other type of question was of the 'I've got cousin/ aunt / etc. in London, or Birmingham. or Newcastle. I wonder if you know them,' having no conception of the size of cities involved.

Then the Ladies started coming out and I finally registered the presence of a long trestle table further down the garden, on which they started loading dishes and plates, so I decided that it was a meal after all. The now cooked meats were heaped on a great big platter, and put on the table along with all the other goodies. One of the visitors, who Pat later introduced as the local Priest, said Grace; and I as a visitor, was pushed forward to take first helping. There was so much on the table that was strange to me, I just stuck with bits of what I recognised. When I finally got a chance to talk to Pat, I asked her what the various dishes were, and sampled a few more of the salad types.

I specially enjoyed what I later found were Venison steaks. I was living high on the hog for a kid from Cardiff. I didn't know then, that many years later, in another country, I would become a Barbie aficionado myself.

I enjoyed the rest of the afternoon, and finally got a proper introduction to Francie, Pat's sister, and her fiancée, who also did something at the hospital. I was told what, but it did not register. People started drifting away about 1800, and each came to say Cheerio to me, plus I received two more invitations to Barbies on the next two Sundays. It seemed that the Event was the same but the venue rotated among this particular group, all of whom, it appeared, were of Irish decent, and the males worked at the dockyard. I accepted for the following Sunday provided I was free to come. We knew that we would be leaving soon but not when.

I had several chats with Pat during the quiet spells of the night shift, and mentioned the fact I had noticed the men appeared to do nothing in the house. She told me this attitude of male dominance was widespread, and even more entrenched among the Australians of Irish decent. The way she put it, in household matters the woman was boss, but in all other matters she walked a pace behind. She said she could remember her Grandmother doing literally that, when she and her Grandfather went out together, which was not very often.

We made arrangements to meet at the same time, same place on her day off, I declined an invitation to go home with her, as I had promised one of the other operators that I would do the first watch, 2000 to midnight for him, so I would have to be on the 1930 ferry. I met her, and the weather having turned to one of Sydney's wet and windy days, we went to an afternoon cinema show, had a meal in a little café, just along from the wharf. And then it was nearly time to get the ferry. The rain had stopped, so we separated, she to walk to work, and I went to catch the ferry, having arranged that I would talk to her later, and make arrangements for Sunday 24th as it looked like I would be able to make it, the being that we would be leaving Sydney early on Wednesday 27th. But like all rumours, one could not take bets on it.

On Sunday, I again booked a bed in the Serviceman Accommodation Centre, on the way to Pat's house, then walked with her to the venue of that day's Barbie, which was about five minutes away, in a very similar house. Again I was made most welcome, the only difference, though it did not register at the time, was that Pat came out in the garden with me, instead of staying in the kitchen with the other Ladies, and she stuck fairly close to me for the rest of a pleasant afternoon.

As on the previous Sunday, we caught her usual train for work, but this time the brother did not come with us, so I assumed the family had decided I was trustworthy enough to escort her. On the way in she seemed subdued, just a quiet goodbye, and she went in to work, The next night I spoke to her on the phone, and told her it seemed that we were leaving on Wednesday morning, so I would not get a chance to see her before we left. I thought that she sounded a bit tearful, then decided I was hearing things.

We had exchanged addresses and said we would write, but I warned her that I was not the world best correspondent. As it turned out I could have gone ashore on the Wednesday, as the sailing date was altered to the 28th and leave was given till 2200 on the 27th, but I didn't. I subbed for one of the other operator instead,

The next morning, at 0800, the fleet left Sydney, in formation, straight up the Pacific, carrying out exercises in American fleet procedure, signals.etc.

Our immediate destination was Manus, in the Admiralty Islands, commonly known among the other services as the 'Hellhole of the Pacific'. When we eventually got there, about March 7th, we found out why.

The fleet anchored in what is termed a roadstead, the open space between two island groups, essentially open water, but shallow enough that the ships could anchor, although we, as did the other capital ships, had two anchors down, and an anchor watch set, because the holding was not good. The temperature hovered between 90 and 110o day and night, and the humidity was so high you could almost drink the air. But the worst thing of all was the perpetual long, loping, swell which gave the ship a continuous slow roll though 10 to 15 degrees. And there was no shore leave of any kind for anybody.

And there we sat, while the powers that be, in the shape of General MacArthur, argued with Admiral Nimitz and Admiral Bruce Fraser against using us in the north Pacific, maintaining we would only get in the way of the US fleet. (there were reports that Fraser reminded MacArthur that the RN had fought in the Pacific before the US was a nation). MacArthur wanted us to be sent to the Philippine, Borneo area, while Nimitz wanted to use us to strengthen his fleet for the coming invasion of Formosa and Okinawa. In the end political pressure resulted in the BPF, on March 15th being ordered to report to Ad. Nimitz, for duty in the Iceberg series of operation. Finally on March 19th, we joined the fantastic assembly of 385 warships in the Ulithi Lagoon at Leyte. As Task Force 57, we were to alternate with Task Force 52, in neutralising the airfields on the islands of Miyaka and Ishigaki in the Sakashima- Gunto group, so they could not be used for staging aircraft from Formosa to Okinawa.

March 20th-March 25th

Battleship King George V (V.Ad. Rawlings) Howe

Carriers Indomitable (R.Ad. Vian), Illustrious, Indefatigable, Victorious.

Cruisers Swiftsure, Gambia, Black Prince, Argonaut, Eurylus.

Destroyers Grenville, Ulster, Undine, Urania, Undaunted, Kemperfelt, Wager, Whirlwind, Quickmatch, Quiberon, Queensborough.

Left Ulithi for the flying off point 80 miles south of Sakishima- Gunto, refueling on the way from the supply group:-

Escort Carriers, Striker, Speaker, Sloops Crane, Pheasant, Frigate, Findhorn, and 3 Tankers.

March 26- March 27

Attacks on Miyaka and Ishigaki. In this period the carriers flew off 273 strike, and 275 CAP (covering air patrol) sorties, with a loss of 9 aircraft in combat, and 11 through deck landing crashes, 9 aircrew were lost.

Typhoon warning stopped a proposed bombardment on the 28th by the battleships and cruisers, arranged partly to relieve their boredom. The rest of us were too busy to be bored, as TF 57 dropped back to replenish supplies, mainly aircraft, and refuel.

Our present tankers let us down, they were too slow, fastest 9knts, their pumps were too slow, and they had not been adapted to the American system of side oiling. While we were out TF 52 took over to keep up the .pressure.

March 31st -April 2nd TF 57 Back for more of the same.

On the 1st, Illustrious was hit by a Kamikaze, at the base of the Island, wrecking the crash barrier, the flight deck sick bay, and putting a 3inch gauge in the flight deck. This happened at 0727, and they were flying again 0816. The US Liaison officer on board made a remark .

“If an American carrier had been hit by a Kamikaze like that, it would have been six months in Pearl. When a Limey carrier gets hit, they bring out the brooms, sweep up, and are away again in an hour” The quote was picked up by the news service and published in some of the papers, and was apparently received by the public with mixed feelings.

Flying went on all day, and at 1730, a Kamikaze got through and dived at Victorious who was turning at the time. The turn was tightened so that we nearly met ourselves coming back, but it did the trick. The plane missed the flight deck, but its wing clipped the port edge, flipping it in to the sea about 80 odd feet away, and the 500lb bomb went up, deluging the flight deck with water, bits of the plane and pilot. Among the bits that landed was a list for the pilot, showing the outlines and priorities for targets. And the carriers topped the list.

Around about this time my stint in the telephone exchange finished and I rotated back to the Torpedo room. Where we were kept pretty busy, as some of the planes were carrying torpedoes to service any shipping they found in the harbours. It was our job to load them, and depth charges if required, on the planes, and the FAA armourers looked after the bombs and rockets.

April 4th-April 7th

Back for more of the same, this time without any drastic repercussions.

April 10th - April 14th

Our flying off position was changed to a point about 60miles off the coast of Formosa, for attacks on airfields and shipping. But low cloud and bad weather prevented flying. But on the 12th, strikes by Avengers, escorted by Martletts and Corsairs bombed the airfield at Schinchiku and the docks at Kiipun and Tansui. The Japanese counter attacked, but were beaten off with a loss to them of 15, against a loss of 1 for us. Dawn on 13th saw a raid by 22 Japanese torpedo bombers, which cost them 20 planes for no damage to the fleet.

After they were sorted out, the carriers between them launched a total of 56 sorties on Schinchiku, Mateuyama, Giram, and Yonakuni Sima.

Then TF57 withdrew for refueling and replenishments. Illustrious left, having turned over all bar one flight of her serviceable planes to the other carriers.

Escorted by Urania and Quality, she was on her way to Leyte, and then to the UK. She was replaced by Formidable, fresh from the Med.

On this replenishment we received some mail, which included a letter from Pat.

When I got a chance to read it, I got quite a surprise. It had been written two days after we left Sydney, and she wrote that as we had not left till the Thursday, she was disappointed and hurt that I had not made the effort to see her on the Wednesday. She thought I cared more for her than to deliberately choose to take duty that night. One of her fellow operators had told her that I had relieved the other rating so that he could come ashore to see her, (the fellow Operator), and she was very hurt and disappointed. There was quite a bit more that showed me the way the wind was blowing, so far as she was concerned, but I'm dammed if I could think when I had given any indication that I was romantically inclined. So far as I could remember, the only time I had touched her was when we shook hands on the jetty when her party first arrived at the ship.

I straight away wrote back and told her I was sorry if she got the wrong signals. I was very grateful to her and her family for their friendship and hospitality, but taking into account the fact that she was eleven years older than me; a staunch Catholic to my Wishy-Washy C of E, and the fact that at any time I could be on my way home, which was 12000 miles away, the idea had not entered my head.

Having spent most of my childhood in areas of Cardiff, well populated by RC Irish, brought over by the Earl of Bute during the construction of the Cardiff docks, I was aware of the affect any perceived slight against their women had on the volatile menfolk, so remembering Pat's three big brothers, I was very careful in the wording of my reply. However I heard no more at that stage.

April 16th –17th 0500. Back at the Sackishima-Gunto group for further attacks on Ishigaki and Miyaka. The Formidable pilots had been briefed by some of the senior Pilots from the other carriers about the difference between the Japanese way, and the Axis way, particularly the accuracy of their AA fire; but they had to learn the hard way. Consequently Formidable suffered more casualties on that round than the other three carriers combined. One of Formidable's 848Sq. Avengers was shot down, crashing in the sea close inshore in the harbour of Hirara. The Pilot and Air Gunner were killed, but the observer, Sub Lt. Gass was picked up by Victorious's rescue Walrus, while under rifle fire from the shore.

The Japanese had by this time started using piloted flying bombs called Okha. These were carried out on mother planes, then released to make the final run in, while the mother plane hightailed it.. They usually released them so far away that the bomb run out of fuel before they reached the fleet. We had no problems with them, but the American suffered a few hits. Our planes mainly left them alone, because if they got in close enough to shoot them down, there was a good chance that they would be engulfed in the subsequent explosion.

April 18th-19th Refuel and replenish. but, no new aircraft had been received since the 9th, and the aircrews were being whittled away. Victorious alone had lost 12 out of 43 fighter pilots, and 3 complete Avenger crews out of 17.

April 20th Further strikes on the same targets, then in the late eveing, the fleet withdrew to Ulithi (Leyte), for refueling , repairs and replenishments, but no recreation. Ulithi was almost, but not quite as bad as Manus. At least we did not have that horrible, rolling swell, but it was so big that it was the same as being at sea when you are not at sea. In Seamans terms, 'We were under way, but no way on" Not quite true as we had two anchors out. And there was so much shipping that the small boat's Cox'ns were in grave danger of getting lost if away from their ships after dark.

While we were there something happened that would, though I didn't know it at the time, have a big influence on the rest of my life. In the evenings we used to have a pick up game of 'deck rugby' any resemblance to rugby being accidental. During one game, in which I was acting as hooker, I brought my leg up to hook the ball just as the scrum collapsed, and succeeded in breaking my nose with my own knee. I went down to the sick bay and it was strapped and I was given a couple of aspirins, and that was that for the time being,

In the mean time, the in-fighting between MacArthur and Nimitz had flared up again. MacArthur wanted to send us to cover the proposed landings at Tarakan in Borneo but Nimitz wanted to keep us where, as he said, we were doing the most good. In the end, Fleet Admiral Halsey stepped in, and ordered that we stay as we were under Nimitz, at our usual pitch at Sakishima- Gunto.

May 4th .47 Avengers, 20 armed with torpedoes, 21 Corsairs, and 40 Martletts took off to pay a visit to our old friends at Ishigaki and Miyako.

At 1000, the Battleships, Cruisers, and 6 Destroyers left, at 24knts, to lay down a bombardment on Miyako Shina. They arrived and opened fire at 1205, but it was broken off at 1247, when Vian sent Rawlings a SOS that the carriers were under heavy attack by Kamikazes.

They returned at full speed, but it still took the nearly two hours to get back. In the meantime, the Formidable had taken a heavy knock.

It was hit abreast the Island, and a hole blasted in the flight deck, driving debris right through to the engine room. 8 were killed outright and 47 injured, some badly burned. Fire was raging through the parked aircraft in the hanger, and in the torpedo room. All Radar masts except one were damaged.

Capt Ruck-Keene sent a signal to V.Ad Vian, Flag of the carriers " Little Yellow Bastard" to which Vian answered "Are you referring to me"

Another Kamikaze hit the Indomitable on the after end of the flight deck but skidded off over the side, where the bomb exploded in the water. But Victorious's Guardian Angel still spread her wings over us. In the meantime 4 of Formidable's Corsairs landed on Victorious. It was the overall results of this action which convinced the Americans of the value of armoured flight decks.

May 5th Back in business in the Sakishima –Gunto area.17 more sorties were flown that day, with no resistance.

May 6th –7th Refueling and taking on replacement aircraft, The Destroyer Kempenfelt, which had sustained substantial damage in the attack on the 4th, was replaced by the Napier.

May 8th Bomber strikes and close range bombardments planned for this day had to be cancelled due to low cloud and torrential rain. The covering air patrols which had been flown off before the weather closed in, had to be guided back to the carriers by all ships shining their searchlights on the base of the clouds.

May 9th 4 Bomber strikes, 2 to each island, involving 73 Avengers, 26 Corsairs, 26 Fireflies carrying rockets, and 54 assorted fighters. 1 Fighter was lost.

That afternoon, at 1645, Kamikazes made a repeat appearance. Formidable was again the unlucky one. She was hit on the flight deck, in the middle a ranged flight, setting them alight, and due to a rivet being blown out of the deck, burning petrol leaked in to the hanger, starting fires there. But; amazingly, she was ready to fly again at 1755, but with only 4 Avengers and 11 Corsairs left.

Victorious was hit by 1 Kamikaze, on the flight deck, just by B2 Turret blowing a hole in the deck, damaging the assisted take off gear, and putting 1 of the forward lift motors out. There were 27 injured, several by burns, because of their failure to wear anti-flash gear. 4 were seriously injured, of whom 2 died later.

A 2nd hit the after end of the flight deck. It skidded across the deck without exploding, but damaged the port 4.5 gun director, 1 arrestor wire, and set fire to 4 Corsairs which were ranged ready for take off. Our guardian angel must have been looking after us again. For if the Kamikaze had hit the Corsairs there would have been one hell of an explosion. And that was the way with all these encounters. Just a foot or so one way or the other could make the difference between life and death.

We were ready for restricted flying, due to the forward lift being out, within 28 minutes, but the lift was back in service in 70 minutes. and we were fully operational, apart from the ATG. which was rarely used anyway.

May 10th-11th Refuel, Repairs, and replenish supplies, and aircraft.

May 12th –13th Back for more, but in a different area, this time 60 miles west of Miyako. A total of 221 offensive sorties were flown in the 2 days.

May 14th –15th Refuel etc.

16th –17th More of the same. The Japanese appeared to have stopped staging aircraft through the 2 islands, but the AA fire was still intense.

This routine continued , 2days in, 2days out, till the 25th. But the air crews were getting done, some having been in continual operation since mid 1944.

also the carriers; and their crews were getting shaky, and reactions were not as sharp as they could have been. A series of deck crashes on Victorious killed 2 pilots, the flight-deck officer (Bats) and 3 aircraft handlers. The same crashes ripped out 2 arrestor wires, and wrecked both crash barriers, This, together with the forward lift motor being unreliable, meant that Victorious was only 40% effective, Formidable's hanger was a shambles, and Indomitable's engines and shafts were giving trouble, restricting her to 22knts. just about the minimum for flying on or off without the aid of a head wind.

May 25th PM TF37 left for Sydney calling in to Manus on the way, where K.G.V. and 3 Destroyers detached to go to Guam, The rest of the fleet arrived in Sydney June 7th, having been at sea since Feb 27th. You could not count our stops in Manus and Leyte as port time, so we had in effect put in 102 days at sea.

During Operation Iceberg, we had replaced 203 aircraft, lost 85 people killed or missing, and 83 injured.

We were in Sydney for 21 days carrying out repairs and refurbishing. Each part of the watch got 4 days leave, with a proviso that no one could go further than 15 miles from the ship. I managed to dodge duty in the telephone exchange this time, but asked the operators that were on, to tell anyone that asked for me, that I had been transferred, on the basis that discretion is the better part of valour. It was as well I did, as Pat rang on the first night asking for me.

I got the third lot of leave, by which time we had heard of a couple of places to go to. Rabbit was on the same leave as me, so we went for three days to a place called Wallacia, a sort of hotel cum holiday camp, just on the outskirts of Sydney. partly bush , partly open country, and a river with some good swimming holes, though in June the weather was cooling of a bit. That was the first and only time I went on leave with anyone. There was a pub about half mile down the road, and that was as far as Rabbit wanted to go. It was at Wallacia, when I went walking, I first started having difficulty with my breathing, as though my nose was blocked. We finally got things back to rights aboard the ship and on the morning of June 28th left Sydney, and flew on our aircraft just outside the heads.

Now designated Task Force 57

Battleship K.G.V. (V.Ad. Rawlings) (Just back from Guam. No leave for them)

Carriers Formidable R.Ad.Vian) Victorious, Implacable, Indefatigable (withdrawn at the last moment)

Cruisers Newfoundland, Black Prince, Euryalus, Achilles, Uganda, Gambia,

Destroyers 5 U. Class, 4 Q. Class, 5 T. Class.

July 4th .Arrived in Manus, which had not improved in our absence. Refueled.

July 6th Left Manus. Just after leaving, Implacable got a seized bearing on her port shaft; this was repaired on the move, taking 9 days.

July 16th Joined with the US 3rd Fleet, under Admiral Halsey. The fleet consisted of 9 fleet carriers, 6 light carriers, 7 Battleships,15 cruisers, and 60 destroyers.

July 17th.. The first British aircraft to attack the mainland of Japan. A total of 37 sorties were flown, including attacks on Niigata, on the west coast, and on shipping in the Sea of Japan.

July18th TF57 moved south due to dense fog, and poor visibility. Attacks were made on airfields in the Tokyo area. Victorious was only able to fly off 6 Corsairs due to contamination in the aircraft fueling system, which was rectified later in the day. and all the fuel filtered through chamois leather. A soul destroying job.

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July 20th Refueling, and as our tankers were running low, our cruisers were allowed to refuel from the American Tanker, and in the process discover how effective their system was, Also Indefatigable rejoined us with her 3 destroyers.

July 24th Attacks on airfields in N.E. Shikoku, and shipping in the inland sea. 416 sorties were flown for the loss of 4 aircraft.

July 25th 155 sorties were flown before the weather closed in, and poor visibility and heavy rain stopped flying.

July 26th-27th Refueling and replenishments. Some of the cruisers oiling from the American tankers again.

July 28th Attacks on Akashi and Fukuyama, and on the Sato shipyards at Harina.

Halsey would at no time allow the BPF to attack the Japanese fleet, wanting all the revenge for Pearl Harbour to go to the Americans.

July 29th The carriers withdrew, while the KGV joined the USS South Dakota in a bombardment on the S.E. coast of Honshu.

July 30th Attacks on airfields in S.W. Honshu, and shipping in Maizuru, and Nagayu Bay. The combined strikes sank the frigate Okinawa, a large freighter, and destroyed 12 Japanese aircraft. 336 sorties were flown that day, with the loss of 2 Seafires, and 1 Corsair, with their Pilots.

July 31st Refueling under typhoon conditions, with huge, long swells, at right angles to the wind, made things very difficult, spreading what should have been a 1 day job in to a 3 day ordeal.

It was at this time I reported to sick bay with problems with my breathing, being unable to breathe through my nose. The doctor told me that when I broke my nose it 'should have been plugged' to stop the cartilage closing over inside. A bit late to tell me now that was what had happened, He told me that I would be sent in to hospital next time we were in Sydney to have the cartilage cut away and open up the nostrils again. It wasn't life threatening, so it would not be done on board.

The next strikes were planned for August 5th, then this was changed to the 8th and 9th, but on the 6th the order was given for ALL ships to withdraw at least 150 miles from the strike area. This, though we did not know it at the time, was due to the imminent dropping of the 1st Atom Bomb, at Hiroshima, on August 7th.

August 9th Attacks were made on Shiogama, Matsushima, Kessenuma, Yamada, Hachinoe, and Koriyama, on airfields, docks, and shipping. A total of 407 sorties were flown. Victorious achieved a record, flying 63 Corsair, and 19 Avenger sorties, a total of 378 flying hours, unfortunately for the loss of 2 pilots. And 7 others were lost though the fleet, including Lt. Hamilton (Hammy) Gray from the Formidable, who was awarded a posthumous Victoria Cross.

That same day, the second Atomic bomb was dropped on Nagasaki.

August 10th More strikes on mainland Japan, but the ships, and aircraft were getting very low on fuel.

August 11th Refueling, but on short rations, as the tankers were getting low as well, and the relief supply ships were still a week away. Also KGV was in bad trouble with both propeller shafts running hot.

August 11th The Japanese radio officially announced that the Emperor had accepted the Potsdam terms of surrender, that is;-

Complete Capitulation of all Japanese Forces Everywhere.

That day's planned strikes were cancelled, but CAPS were still flown.

Fighter squadrons were also ranged in readiness to take off. After Admiral Halsey's warning that we should be on the watch for another 'Pearl Harbour'. He also warned that it was possible that the Emperor's surrender speech would not be accepted by all Japanese Commanders.

August 12th –15th The situation was very confused. TF 37 flew some sorties, mainly to show the flag as V.Ad Vian put it. And there were a few half hearted Kamikaze attacks, with no damage being done.

Then late afternoon on the 15th, all further action was cancelled, followed by Admirals Halsey's now famous signal, " Any Kamikaze attacking the fleet after this time should be shot down in a friendly manner"

It was decided that a token force consisting of, KGV, Indefatigable, 3 Cruisers, and 10 Destroyers would represent the BPF at the official signing of the surrender. The feeling aboard Victorious was that we should have been the carrier. That we had been dealt a dirty deal. We were the senior carrier in terms of service, the only carrier that had taken part in every action with the BPF, as well as serving with the 3rd Fleet before the BPF was formed. It was thought this was possibly because of the known antagonism between V.Ad Vian, and Capt Denny, reputedly dating back to the time when Vian, at the time known as 'Vian of the Cossack', and a legend after his relief of the German prison ship, the Altmark, had a run in with Denny, who was then a Commodore. It had been thought for a long time that this was the reason why Vian would not use Victorious as the carrier flag ship.

The rest of the fleet left for Sydney via Manus, but Victorious and 3 destroyers stopped in Kochi Bay, on the island of Shikaku, to affect repair on our steering gear, which had been playing up for the past 3 weeks. We were there for 2 days, and during that time I spent a fair bit of time, along with half the ship's company watching the girl divers diving for pearl shell. They appeared out of the perpetual mist in the forenoon, about 20 odd small rowing boats, 2 rowing and 2 diving. The girls went down for 4 to five minutes, came up, dropped their bag of shell in the boat, grabbed another bag, took a couple of deep breathes, and went down again. After what must have been their quota of dives, the divers climbed in to the boats, and the lot disappeared in the mist, to return again for a repeat performance in the late afternoon. We thought it was pearls they were diving for, but found out later that the pearls, if any, were a bonus, it was the shell that made the money.

Also while we were in Kochi I had my 21st birthday, Very low key.

We caught up with the rest of the fleet, arriving in Sydney, September 7th, just in time to take part in the Victory Parade, or should I say shambles; on the 8th. There were our five bands 1 from each carrier and 1 from KGV. Somewhere in the region of 7000 from our ships, plus the Australian contribution of another couple of thousand, and another 3 bands. We started landing on Woolloomooloo wharf one ship at a time as fast as our boats and the ferries could land us, and as each ship landed they were formed up in columns of 4 and headed by the band marched off, only to halt while the next lot marched off the wharf, and came in behind them, By the time we were all in line, the head of column was right up the top of George Street and in to Hyde Park. Add the thousands of civilians that had turned up to celebrate, and chaos was not the name for it. When the Parade broke up there was one big seething mass of humanity. I managed get back aboard mid-afternoon, but there were a lot did not make till the next day, having been shangied by celebrating Civilians.

On the 10th we went out beyond Sydney heads and every one on board not on duty was up on the flight deck to witness a very sad ceremony, The Lease –Lend agreement stipulated that at the end of hostilities all planes, trucks, jeeps, tanks and other equipment supplied by the Americans either be returned to them, or Britain pay for it, The Americans did not want it back, as they already had too many of their own, and Britain could not afford to pay for it, So the way out that was decided, was that all goods would be dumped in the sea. All our planes, apart from 1 squadron of Seafires, and the venerable old Walrus, new, used, or bent were pushed over the bow, as we steamed along at about 10knts to spread them over the sea bottom. 58 planes in various stages of repair went overboard, and there were quite a few damp eyes among the onlookers. Add what we dumped to what the other 3 carriers dumped, and it added up to a fair sum of money wasted.

The next day I was called to the sick bay, and told that I would be going in to hospital the next day, and would be in there for at least a week. I was to pack my kitbag and hammock and have them on the gangway at 0900 September 12th. As it was known that the Victorious would be leaving for home in the near future, I asked if the operation could be postponed till we got back to Britain. Not a chance, The paper work had been done and that was that. So at 0900 on September 12th I said goodbye to my home for the last 4½ years. The longest I had lived in one place in life up to then. The Victorious left Sydney bound for the UK on September 18th. But I didn't see her go.

I had enjoyed my time on the Vic, and could truthfully say that I knew her as few others on board did. Starting with the eight months I had spent as Commander Surtees's messenger, while he got to know his new ship, searching out every nook and cranny, as well as learning my way round, I increased my already good (without boasting) knowledge of seamanship, both Naval, and Merchant service. He was constantly asking me questions, and if I couldn't answer I would be told to find out before the next day. I spent my time over the years poking in all sorts of holes and corners, some of which I had no business to be in. Whatever I did, I always wanted to know how and why, something that did not always endear me to my superiors, as I found it hard to take orders from some one who obviously didn't know his job.

But I honestly think that this attitude protected me from one of the worst aspects of living on a ship, both at sea and in port.

BOREDOM, and there was no doubt that 90% of time was very boring, with make work jobs to fill in the time, and just the 10% when you were doing something that counted.

The other thing I gave a lot of thought to, was trying not to get in the habit of thinking of Casualty figures as just figures, but as flesh and blood, on both sides. and very soon came to the conclusion that there is no Glory in war, and nobody wins.

A thing that made me wild, was when, for instance, a report said, 'for the loss of 1,2,6 or x number of planes' the crews of those planes were never mentioned, and by doing so, the human aspect was ignored as if it didn't count.