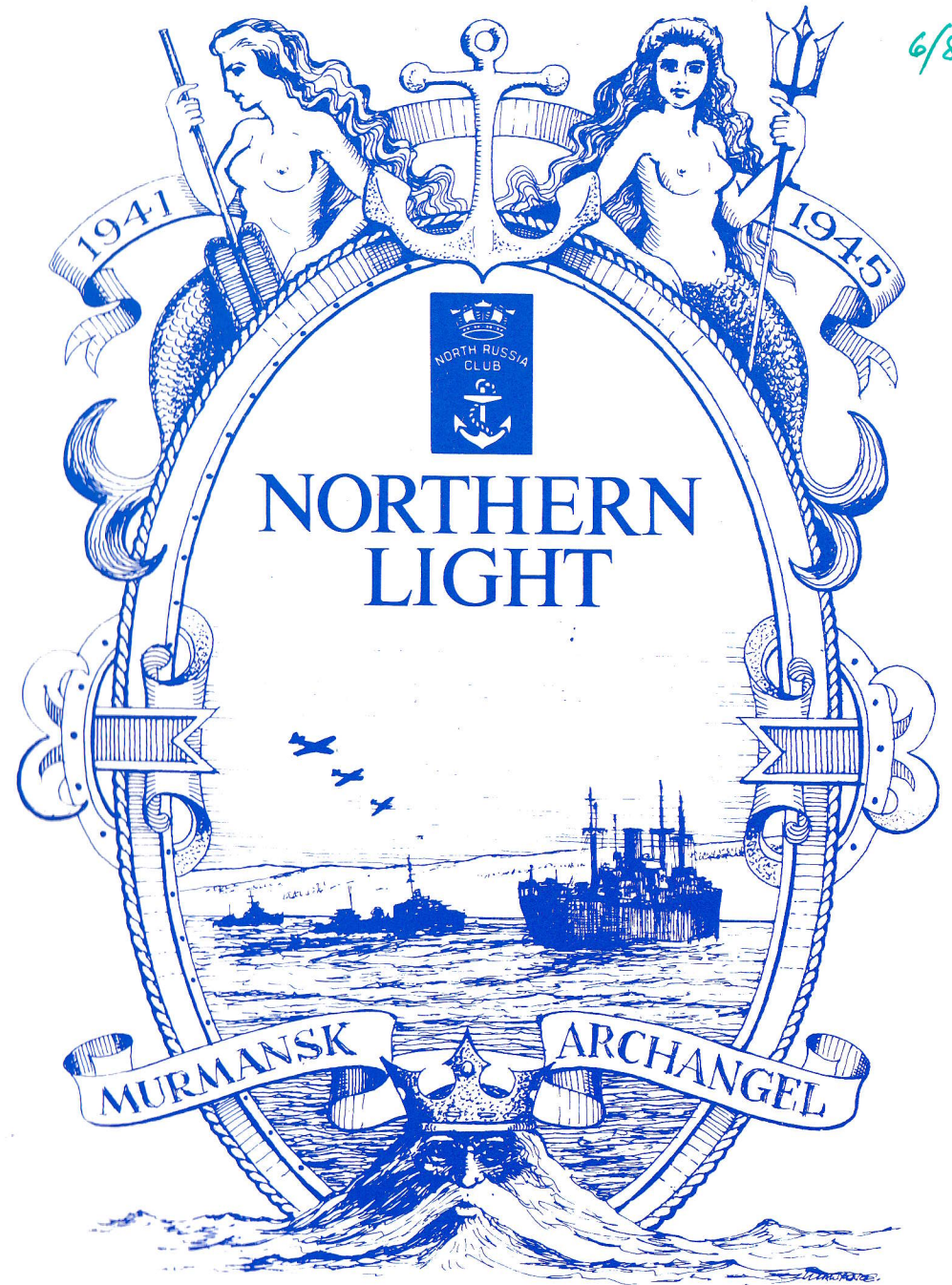


16
6/89



OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE NORTH RUSSIA CLUB

6/89

J U N E 1 9 8 9

E D I T O R I A L

For my sins, the committee have purchased a new electronic typewriter-cum-word processor, in the hope that I can produce a better quality magazine. I'm sure that this will happen - in time! But I do object to those members of committee who refer to it as Dick's new toy! At this stage I think it is more like an animal - and one that is not yet properly house trained. It's going to be a long time to tech it to spell Korrektly. Does anyone know a remedy?

Many thanks to the few of you who didn't point out the glaring mistake on Page 1 of the last issue. I have attended Jimmy's Defaulters and my excuse was, "I was only testing, Sir"! "'MARCH 1945' was a date I used to see if our readership would notice". 'Jimmy' said, "They did" and "You are a Ruddy Liar".

As promised, the main feature in this issue is "Escort Carriers" your response was excellent and we will run another feature on the same topic early next year.



A "NAIRANA" Wildcat comes in a little too wild---
---and lands 'On a Wing and a Prayer'.

Next issue will be the merchant navy's turn - come on all you 'Red Duster' lads, let's have your stories by mid-August.

Following many complaints regarding delivery of your magazine we are trying a different method with this mailing. Please let me know if you notice any improvement - or have further complaints!'

Happy Reading
R.D. SQUIRES, Editor

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor,

THE LAST WISH OF A GREENOCK WIDOW

I would like to add a little more to the 'EMPIRE SKY' article published in the last edition of Northern Light.

It was at the end of October, or early November 1942, that thirteen merchant ships in Reykjavik were approached by an official to volunteer to sail to Murmansk without escorts. We were offered £50 per man bonus. The ships were to depart at approximate twelve hour intervals, three turned back leaving ten to proceed on the voyage. These were five U.S. and five British. I was aboard "EMPIRE SCOTT" the last ship to sail. The "EMPIRE SKY" was sunk in the early hours of the morning, we arrived in her last known position at about 1500, but there was no sign of survivors or debris. There was thick fog which lasted for several days. Three American and two British vessels arrived at Murmansk, another American had gone on the rocks off Spitzbergen. The fact that the U-boat had been damaged possibly saved us - and other vessels.

Gordon W. Long.

Dear Editor,

A CORTINA IN PLACE OF A CORVETTE

My wife, on seeing the T.V. shots of the devastation caused by the earthquake in Armenia, decided to try to help. An appeal was given out at the local church. Within hours there was a convoy of cars up my road, to hand over blankets and warm clothing, forty bags in all. Then followed three round trips to the collection depot, my Cortina loaded to the gunwhales.

A Cortina is definately preferable to a Corvette, and the trip to depot far more easy than the trips north, over that corrugated water, to the land where the deep freeze door was always open.

But only too pleased to help.

Arthur W. Bartle, ex 'HONEYSUCKLE'(K27).

Dear Dick,

UNITED STATES WARSHIPS

With reference to Neville Rodgers' article on USS "ALABAMA" and "SOUTH DAKOTA" and 'Limey' buntings detailed thereto: I had this experience when I was detailed off to pack my bag and hammock and go to a destroyer, the USS "MADISON" in April 1942. I was being 'lent' as they put it, for liaison purposes, she looked a beautiful ship as the boat approached her, with brand new paintwork, etc. There were several other 'Buntings' from various ships, including the Scapa Depot Ship "TYNE". We were made extremely welcome and the food onboard, in comparison, was out of this world - and we were given an advance in dollars so that we could use their equivalent of the NAAFI, we even had our dhobying done for us (yes they had laundries on their destroyers).

We were on her for about three months screening the "Big Ships" covering Russian convoys and after that "MADISON" went back to the States. We were transferred to another destroyer the USS "RHIND" and carried on as before, the ironical part was that we found out afterwards that we were entitled to a shilling a day 'Hard Layers' from our Navy,

because we had nowhere to sling our hammocks, it was like living in the Ritz and being paid for it. The Americans, of course, all had bunks on their ships.

After another advance of dollars we were living like lords. These advances were given as credit, we never however, had to pay them back and perhaps we will be arrested if ever we go to the States.

However, all good things come to an end. We had to say farewell and it was back to 'Straight Rush' and 'Clacker' grub on "ONSLow". Gone were the days of keeping watch on a cosy, heated, closed in bridge.

These Yankee destroyers never actually went all the way to the Kola Inlet and most of the crews were disappointed, but I was quick to assure them with the words: 'YOU AIN'T MISSED NOTHING'.

Tom Upton.

Now a cutting from the Caithness local newspaper, sent in by Sandy Manson.

REUNION FOR "ROYAL OAK" SURVIVORS

Thurso British Legion has approached Caithness District Council requesting financial assistance to stage a reception for survivors of HMS 'ROYAL OAK' sunk in Scapa Flow 50 years ago this October.

Around 30 members of the 'Royal Oak' Survivors Association and their wives plan to commemorate the tragic event by travelling to Thurso at the end of August, with accomodation and travel arrangements made by the local R.B.L. committee.

At Monday's council meeting in Wick, members will be asked to provide funding up to £450 for a special reception in the Legion club-rooms to mark the anniversary, bringing together civic dignitaries, senior officers of the present day armed services and the survivors. 'Royal Oak' was among the largest battleships at the outbreak of World War Two, despite the fact that she was one of the original Dreadnoughts designed to revolutionise the Navy in the early 1900s - built in 1914 at Devonport, she weighed in at 29,150 tons.

At the outbreak of war she was part of the Home Fleet, flying the flag of Admiral H.E.C. Balgrove, and it was while under his command she was dealt her death blow, taking with her 822 officers and men.

The ship lay at anchor at the extreme end of Scapa Flow harbour when at 0130 on October 14th she was struck by a torpedó, causing an exlosion in the bows. This was followed by a further salvo fired by a German U-boat which had broken through the 'impregnable' defences around the anchorage. Within twenty minutes the ship had gone down with a tremendous loss of life, including the admiral and other senior officers. It's distance from other ships preventing a prompt rescue of those onboard.

NAVY BLUE

In the park beside the lake, I watched the boats go by,
A picture gay and colourful against a summer sky.

And suddenly a sailor lad came drifting into view
Strange it was to see him there, that boy in navy blue.

I saw him resting on his oars beneath the willow tree,
Was he sailing in his thoughts upon some distant sea?

In a convoy bound for Malta, bombed by night and day
Or taking tanks to Russian harbours, fighting all the way.

(Found on deck onboard "MATCHLESS" in 1943 by Sandy Manson)

Dear Dick,

My latest book on the Russian Convoys is being published by Fontana Paperbacks (approx. £4) on October 20th. The foreword is by the Admiral of the Fleet Lord Lewin of Greenock. The book is entitled "RUNNING THE GAUNTLET". If any member would like me to personally sign the book I will be pleased to do so. Just send the book to my address : 61 Longmead Road, Windmill Green, Paignton, Devon TQ3 1AX. enclosing a large stamped addressed envelope.

Also, should anyone wish to purchase a copy of my first book,--- "THE SHIP THAT TORPEDED HERSELF" (the story of PQ13 and 'Trinidad') I still have a few, personally signed hardbacks left at only £3 each. Plus large stamped (59p) addressed envelope.

Frank Pearce.

Dear Editor,

The following item appeared in the Sunday Post on 12th March 89 would it be possible to include it in N.L.? J.B.R. (included with much pleasure. Ed)

"I AM ONE OF ONLY 15 SURVIVORS FROM H.M.S."MAHRATTA" SUNK ON RUSSIAN CONVOY IN FEBRUARY 1944, AND WOULD LIKE TO CONTACT OTHERS" LES BLOODWORTH, 105 BISHOPTHORNE ROAD, BRISTOL

Dear Dick,

We held our first re-union for Welsh members of N.R.C. on April 1st. last and I might add that it was very successful we had a wonderful time. We were honoured by the presence of the Deputy Lord Mayor of Swansea.

We all offer thanks to Shipmate Tom Morris for his wonderful efforts in organising the re-union and making it such a memorable evening. We are looking forward to another venue, same date, next year.

Tom Upton.

Dear Dick,

I was on "BAMBOROUGH CASTLE", consequently N.L.N°15 brought back a few memories. Particularly when referring to "DENBIGH CASTLE" and "LARK". We stood by whilst "BELLONA"s diving team were in action and the following amusing story comes to mind.

During the diving operation a number of small boats gathered around, the occupants appeared to be partisans of some description, both male and female, complete with rifles and bandoliers etc. They were trading hats, and knives for whatever was going food, fags or nutty. One young female had an item on offer that took the fancy of a N.R.C. member who shall remain nameless. It was a knife I think, for which she wanted cheese! "Hold on" said our nameless one as he disappeared down to the mess deck, reappearing a short time later with what seemed to be the required commodity. Trustingly she sends up the knife and Jolly Jack sends down the cheese of which she immediately takes a bite, only to find that it was a bar of 'purser's hard' soap. Her immediate reaction was to slap a bullet up the spout exclaiming that he had no parents! Whereupon, upper deck was cleared with everyone disappearing quickly down every available hatch or bulkhead door. I wonder if he still has the knife.

Bob Brighton.

From: The Venerable N D Jones CB QHC BA

CHATHAM MEMORIAL WINDOW FUND

At the end of the Second World War, the names of all those men of the Chatham Port Division who gave their lives were commemorated in a Book of Remembrance and the Chatham ships which were lost were also remembered by the installation of stained glass windows depicting the ships' crests. These memorials together with the First World War Book of Remembrance were housed in the Nore Chapel of St George's Church, H.M.S.PEMBROKE. When Chatham Dockyard and the Naval Base closed in 1983, St George's ceased to be a church, so the Books of Remembrance were removed to the Royal Engineers's Garrison Church at Brompton for safe keeping. St George's itself is now maintained by the local council and the stained glass windows and other memorials have been preserved in situ.

Since 1983, the Army Chaplain has converted a corner of the Garrison Church into a small Naval Chapel, with a White Ensign hanging in one corner and Royal Naval Associations and WRNS Association Standards in the other, with a small altar between. The two Books of Remembrance are now kept in this chapel together with two kneeling stools. It has become a tradition that a Naval Service be held in the Garrison Church each year on the Sunday nearest to Trafalgar Day.

Some time ago, a suggestion was made that it would be appropriate to create a more permanent record of what is believed to be a unique association between the Army and the Royal Navy, and that this take the form of stained glass in the windows above the altar. A simple design with the Naval Crown in one window and the Globe and Laurel in the other was proposed with a fouled anchor in the small window above. This proposal has been agreed by the Naval authorities and the Royal Engineers, and will cost about £5,000.

It is thought that many who were connected with the Royal Naval Barracks, Royal Marines Barracks and the Dockyard in Chatham would wish to be associated with this project which will continue to keep alive the memory of the Chatham Port Division. I have therefore authorised the opening of a fund to receive donations for this project and if you would like to help, please send your contribution, large or small, to:

Lieutenant Commander H Blease MBE RN (Retd)
Hon Treasurer
Chatham Memorial Window Fund
c/o The Senior Chaplain's Office
Headquarters RSME
Chatham
Kent ME4 4UG

I would be very grateful for your support.

Noel Jones

"ESCORT AND "WOOLWORTH" CARRIERS IN THE ARCTIC.

The request for items for use in this edition's 'Carrier' feature brought a terrific response - enough for possibly three editions of NORTHERN LIGHT. There were also a few words of warning about the use of the title 'Woolworth'. As one of these warnings came from an ex-'jaunty' I had better watch my step. The feature will consist of a series of excerpts - some from official reports, some from diaries and others from your letters.

First, from Sid Conley's letter:

I point out that "Woolworth" carrier is a misnomer as far as "ACTIVITY", "AUDACITY", "CAMPANIA", "NAIRANA" and "VINDEK" were concerned and you may get an unfavourable response from lads who served on those ships. I think you will find that those who served in British built ships have a particular, even if not reasonable pride in that fact.

"AUDACITY", the first British Escort Carrier was converted from a German banana-boat and commissioned at Blyth, Northumberland, on 20 June 1941.

"ACTIVITY" was the first all British built merchant-hull to be made available for conversion into an auxiliary carrier. She was larger than "AUDACITY" and had twice the capacity for aircraft.

"VINDEK", "NAIRANA" and "CAMPANIA" were all British built hulls made available for auxiliary carriers. They were completed in the yards at which they were first laid down: "VINDEK" at Swan Hunters, Newcastle on Tyne, "NAIRANA" at John Browns, Clydebank and "CAMPANIA" at Harland & Woolf, Belfast.

There was a vast difference between the all-riveted, steel flight deck British ships and the welded, wooden deck American built "Woolworth" Carriers.

And now, from Sid's subsequent letter:

I did quite a few Russian Convoy runs both in "NIGERIA", 1941 and 1942 then in "NAIRANA", 1944 and 1945. It is not easy now to make comparisons or truly segregate the good, the bad or the bloody awful. To be quite honest I think that most of them would fall under the last category. However, JW64 and the return convoy RA64 in "NAIRANA" were by far the worst. There is no doubt that those convoys suffered the most continuous and lethal enemy aircraft attacks coupled with the most appalling weather conditions ever experienced on Russian Convoys.

"I can recall an incident whilst standing alongside the starboard after Pom Pom and watching a Ju88 coming into attack. At first I was delighted in watching the captain of the gun calmly holding his fire, waiting until the JU88 was within range at which it was impossible for the Pom Poms to miss him. The bloody kite was practically inboard and by this time I was screaming my head off to 'Fire'-'Fire'. The torpedo was dropped so close, it seemed to me that it must surely hit the ships side. At that moment "NAIRANA" was hit by a stern sea and lifted some 30 feet. The tinfish passed harmlessly under the stern. I don't know how the JU88 managed to clear our flight deck as she started to climb. The captain of the gun was one of my staff and I started to use some very insulting expletives to him before he replied in kind to say "the.....gun has jammed" .

"NAIRANA" was my first experience in a Carrier.....For the benefit of those who have only served in Pukka R.N. Ships the Escort Carriers were a different world. The ships company fell into three categories, Fleet Air Arm, T124X and R.N. All engine room and cooks and stewards were T124X (Merchant Navymen serving under special articles). Whilst I learned to have the greatest respect for these men after seeing a few convoys through with them, it nevertheless must be said that they experienced some difficulty in accepting naval discipline. Maintaining discipline and a high morale with the mixed ships company of over 800 men was not easy, especially having regard to the hazardous and tiring duties imposed on the Russian Convoys. However I never recall any incident when "NAIRANA" was not able to fulfill her roll. Some very unorthodox methods were often applied in circumstance where the Naval Discipline Act and KR & AIs were something one was aware of, but applied the Nelson touch to. One wonders if perhaps a record of how this was achieved should not be put on paper especially for the information of my Lords of the Admiralty. Then again, is it not a fact that such things were achieved simply by acting in accordance with unwritten naval traditions established over the past 200 years and whatever was done had all been done before in other theatres of war or stress and would be done again should a need arise.

The prime object of the Carrier is to keep her aircraft airborne as, and when needed and both "NAIRANA" with her 835 Squadron and our sister ship "CAMPANIA" with 813 Squadron achieved this to a remarkable degree having regard to the atrocious weather conditions and frequency of heavy air attacks and the constant 24 hour night and day A/S Patrols with open cockpits by the Swordfish. You have to experience life on a carrier to really appreciate the skill and courage of the aircrews particularly those in the Escort Carriers with their small flight decks. So much of the flying on that convoy was night flying. Particularly hazardous in bad seas. Each take off and landing represented a feat of skill and cool nerve. The success of landing depended too on the skill of the Batsman. Flag Officer R A McGregor made this point in a report when he said "Getting the fast fighters safely aboard in a 60 knot wind with the carrier's stern rising and falling 50 feet was largely due to the skill of the Batsman". Many times I watched Swordfish taking off in blinding snow storms from a pitching flight deck disappearing from vision as they struggled to lift off and thinking "come back safe lads". Unfortunately some never did.

B.M.S. "TRACKER" and 853 Squadron. On 11 Sept. 1944 a ground party and the Squadron stores were transferred to "TRACKER" by sea. The aircraft flew aboard in the Firth of Clyde on 12th and the ship anchored at Rosneath. During the next few days the squadron was completed by the addition of 3 Wildcat fighters. "TRACKER" proceeded to the Tail of the Bank to take on stores on 20th. During the next three weeks extensive training for aircrews was undertaken. The ship proceeded to Scapa Flow via the Minches in company with "VINDEK" (811 Squadron), and "NAIRANA" (835 Squadron) and screened by the 21st Escort Group. During the voyage the squadron made its first operational sortie. The ship arrived at Scapa on 15th. On 19th the squadron was brought up to full complement of 11 Avengers and 6 Wildcats, with an additional crew on loan from 852 Squadron.

"TRACKER" sailed from Scapa Flow on the 21st October 1944 in company with "VINDEK", "NAIRANA" and "DIDO" and escorted by "UNDAUNTED", "NUBIAN" and the 21st Escort Group, to join the escort of Convoy RA61. On 22nd, two Avengers sighted the convoy. The carrier force joined the convoy on 23rd. It consisted of merchant ships and submarine chasers bound for Russia. The carriers and "DIDO" were stationed in the centre of the merchantmen. Close screening was by the 17th Destroyer Flotilla and the 8th and 21st Escort Groups. The 3rd and 15th Escort Groups formed an extended screen.

During the passage the carriers took it in turns to be duty ship for 8 hours each. "TRACKER" maintained two-plane 'Adder' patrols from 0630 on

25th, 26th and 27th. The weather was bad with winds of 35 knots and the flight deck pitching 20 to 40 feet when the ship was into the wind. "TRACKER" homed a lost Swordfish from "VINDEK" and it finally landed at a speed of only 30 knots. Despite the adverse conditions "VINDEK" scrambled two Wildcats to intercept a 'bogey' which proved to be a Russian Catalina.

On 27th D/F bearings indicated that five U-boats were in the vicinity and an additional three aircraft were launched on a close search. A 510 ton U-boat on the surface. After signalling its position, course and speed to the convoy, the aircraft attacked as the U-boat crash dived. Using an acoustic homing depth charge and with ideal conditions the attack should have been successful. But, on its return to the carrier it was found that the plane's arming device wiring was short circuited and the 'Oscar' depth charge had been dropped unarmed. On 28th "TRACKER" arrived in the Kola Inlet and anchored in Vaenga Bay, where it remained for four days on aircraft maintenance work.

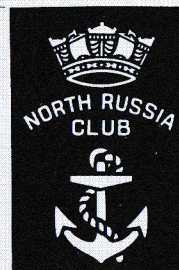
She sailed from the Inlet on 2nd November to escort the homeward bound convoy. U-boats were said to be waiting outside the inlet and surface escorts dropped many depth charges. The squadron maintained a 3 aircraft patrol throughout the 3rd, flying 14 sorties and 4 aircraft landing on in total darkness. Further sorties were flown on 4th and again the last returning aircraft landed-on in darkness. On 5th the wind fell to 3-5 knts insufficient to operate Avengers with a full load of depth charges, and "TRACKER"s turn as duty carrier was taken over by "NAIRANA". Continuous patrols were flown by both squadrons and the only incidents reported were 'fuel leaks' and 'burst tyres'. "TRACKER" arrived at Scapa on 11th, when the squadron went on leave. On 1st December the squadron flew off "TRACKER" for the last time.

The squadron's next ship was "QUEEN". On 19th March 1945 "QUEEN" sailed from Scapa Flow in company with "BELLONA", "PREMIER" and "SEARCHER" and escorted by "ONSLOW" (D17), "IROQUOIS", "ZEST", "HAIDA" and "SERAPIS" to take part in "Operation Cupola". Avengers from 846 Squadron on "PREMIER" laid mines off the Norge Coast of Norway, whilst Wildcats from "SEARCHER"s 882 Squadron provided fighter cover for the strike force. Both Avengers and Wildcats from "QUEEN" provided anti-submarine patrols and fighter cover for the carrier force. The mine laying operation was successful but the weather deteriorated with the wind reaching 40 knots on the surface and 60 knots over the deck. Several aircraft sustained damage on landing and the force returned to Scapa Flow on 21st. Three days later "QUEEN" in company with "BELLONA", "DIDO", "SEARCHER", "NAIRANA" and "PUNCHER" with seven destroyers of D17 for "Operations Prefix and Carefree". The Avengers were bombed up with four 500lb bombs each, but the operation was not brought to a successful conclusion. After making a good landfall the planes flew to Fillan, Havr and the Island of Smolen to bomb a north bound convoy. No shipping was found, however. The alternative target of coastal guns and flak position on the Island of Smolen could not be located either and the aircraft were forced to jettison their bombs before they could land on the respective carriers. The ships stood off the Norwegian coast on 27th and 28th. "SEARCHER" launched her Wildcats against Aasborg. The ceiling was too low for glide bombing, and a further Avenger strike was aborted. The frustrated force returned to Scapa Flow but had the satisfaction of shooting down three ME109s and damaging another during the operations.

More about these squadrons and carriers later:

Now to 825 Swordfish Squadron and "VINDEK".

825 Squadron was at Limavady in Northern Ireland operating under Coastal Command against U-boats close to the western coasts of Britain and Ireland. 825 had only left "VINDEK" in November and all hands were preparing to go on Christmas leave when the C.O. Freddie Sheffield said "Sorry chaps we are going back to "Vindex", the squadron had just replaced their aging Hurricanes for 8 Wildcats.



"NEWSLETTER"

JUNE 1989

"NEWS" FROM CHRIS 'N DICK.

First, from Hon. Sec. Chris: It seems a long time since I last said "Hullo there", now that we only have a Quarterly Newsletter tied in with the circulation of "Northern Light". I hope that this finds you in good health and spirits. Unfortunately, I have to tell you that four of your officers and committee have recently been in dock for refits. All needed hospitalisation, but are now on the full road to recovery. I am sure that you will all wish the best of health to Chairman Dennis Whitehouse, Vice-Chairman Norman Batchelor, Memorial Secretary Ron Wren and committee member Bill Loades.

It is now a sad, but regular duty to report that the following members have recently "Crossed the Bar". Our Welfare Officer has been in contact with the families concerned:

Robert Baker of Bedminster, Bristol. ex "Britomart".

Ernest Mitchell of Blackpool, ex 55th Field Corps. Ernest was our oldest member and an article regarding his service in Russia appeared on page 18 of the last "Northern Light" - a fitting epitaph.

Edward Haddel of Chatham, Kent, ex "Empire Tide". Edward was a well known and much respected member of our strong contingent from the Medway towns.

Are you travelling to Dover this summer? If so, why go to a lot of expense in Dover hotels?. Join me for the evening and overnight in my new Guest Room (twin beds). I would be glad of your company and to meet you - it would be my pleasure - and I live just 49 paces from the 'Dewdrop' Public House!! Also, I know an excellent, large Victorian Guest House in Dover (B.& B. £15 per head) - Baulah House, 94 Crabble Hill, Dover, Kent. (Tel: 0304 824615)

Soviet Commemorative Medals: It would appear that we have lost our battle to obtain medals for all members who applied by questionnaire up to 31st March 88. Mr. Alexei Nikiforov, Counsellor to the Ambassador, has now left the Embassy to take up a position in the Soviet Foreign Office in Moscow. Our information is that no more medals are being presented, anywhere. The 40th Anniversary of Victory Day, which the medal commemorates is long past.

Annual General Meeting 1989: A reminder that the meeting is scheduled to take place at the Victory Services Club, Marble Arch, London, on Saturday 29th July at 1345. Please try to attend - the committee deserves your support. That evening, a Members, Ladies and Guests Buffet Dance also takes place at the same venue with entertainment by the Alan Bannister Cabaret Show Band. There are still a few vacancies - if you have mislaid your booking form, just drop me a letter, tickets for the full evening are £12 per head. Closing date for catering purposes is Saturday 22nd July. Dick tells me that the block booking for the Royal Tournament on Friday night, 28th July, is fully booked - there are no more seats available at the reduced rate. Incidentally, if you are unable to attend the A.G.M. but have a matter you would like to put forward for discussion, please submit it in writing - to Dick, you have his address.

News i.

Continued:

A Weekend of Nostalgia in London: To commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the Outbreak of War on September 3rd, we have arranged the following events: You may be interested in attending one or just all of them.

Saturday 2nd September at 11 a.m. A wreath laying ceremony at the Russian Memorial at Brookwood Military Cemetery, Surrey. Trains run very frequently from Waterloo. If you are one of our 'Walking Wounded' please let us know so that we can arrange transport from Brookwood Station to the Military Cemetery. (Contact Dick on 051 487 9567)

"Those Were The Days" Buffet Dance at Victory Services Club. Music and Dancing 1939-1945 style with the Alan Bannister Cabaret Show Band. A separate booking form accompanies this newsletter. Book early and please make your cheques payable to "North Russia Club".

Sunday 3rd September at 10-30 a.m. A Service of Commemoration and Thanksgiving on the Quarterdeck of H.M.S. Belfast, (by kind permission of the Imperial War Museum and Captain F.A. Collins R.N.) The service will be conducted by N.R.C. member, The Rev. Canon Colin Craston, B.A., B.D. Chaplain to H.M. The Queen. Tickets for the service will be in short supply - how many can you seat on a cruiser's quarterdeck?? These will be allocated, firstly, to those who are attending the Saturday night function. The balance will then be allocated in strict rotation. Music for the service will be provided by the Mailing Youth Brass. We had hoped to provide a buffet lunch after the service, but this has been cancelled as the Crew Messdeck is not now available.

Note: A few rooms are available for non VSC members on Saturday night. Please contact me.

5th Annual Reunion Dinner Dance at Swallow Hotel, South Normanton, Derbyshire. This year's reunion on 21st October coincides with Trafalgar Day, so there will be a distinct 'Nelson's Touch' about the whole evening. Yes, of course the 'Mainbrace' will be 'Spliced', amongst other things. Dick will gratefully, and readily, accept donations towards the 'Run Tub', Woods, Pussers, Lambs and Captain Morgan are all acceptable!!! Entertainment will again be provided by The Midnighters Trio.

Now, for the details - The Swallow Hotel is situated at Junction 28 on M1. Cost of the Dinner Dance is £16.50 per head. Seating is limited by Fire and Safety Regulations to 202. Notification and Hotel Booking Form is enclosed in this mailing. Special rates have been agreed with the hotel for N.R.C. members as follows: All rooms are En-Suite and full English Breakfast is included.

Friday, Saturday, Sunday nights £20.00 per person.

Nights either side of above £30.00 per person in twin rooms, or £53.00 Single.

Why not make a 'Friday While' of it ?

Tickets will be sold in strict rotation on a 'First come, First served' basis. All notification forms are being despatched to you in one bulk mailing - so in theory you should receive them on the same day. All applications will be dealt with in strict rotation. There will be no bias towards previous attendance, or period of membership of the club. A man is a member of N.R.C., whether he joined 5 years, 5 months, 5 weeks, or 5 days ago. So, immediately you receive the notification, send it, with cheque, (made payable to N.R.C.) to me. Then your booking form to Swallow Hotel. Do not book hotel until you have paid for tickets. All rooms at the hotel have been pre-reserved for our members.

Mansfield R.N.A. have again invited us to a Buffet Lunch on Saturday 21st at 1200 noon. Coach leaves Swallow at 11.45, returns from Mansfield 14.45. Cost of Coach and Buffet is £2.00 per person. Limited to 75 - if booking, please send separate cheque/postal order.

Future mailings: Many members will know that we have experienced serious delays and mis-direction of mail when mailing our bulk despatches. Despite promises of improvement, we are not yet satisfied or confident that this will happen. Consequently the next bulk mailings will be made in a different part of the country. Let's hope things improve.

Tour to the Soviet Union 1990. Having made numerous enquiries and discovered several significant facts that will almost certainly reduce the charges for 1990. Dick is planning a tour to co-incide with the 45th Victory Day Parade next May. The tour will be to Leningrad and Murmansk only, from Saturday 5th May to Saturday 12th May inclusive. If you wish to be placed on the Tour Mailing List, please write to Dick, giving name, address, post code and telephone number. Your enquiry will be without obligation to take part.

New Members and amendments to Roll Call:

Welcome aboard to:

ASHBOLT Frederick 13 Ferdale House, Manor Road, London N16 5NT.

ATMORE Kenneth 37 Hewitt Road, Dover Kent CT16 1TH.

BAKER Douglas W. 25 Greenway, Chatham, Kent ME5 9UY.

BALLARD Ernest J. 310 Victoria Avenue, Eastbourne, Sussex BN20 8XS.

BEARMAN Ernest E. 64 Rother Crescent, Gossons Green, Crawley, W. Sussex.

BENNETT Ernest L. 35 Gainsborough Avenue, Manor Park, London E12 6JJ.

BLACK John Spindrift, 80 Crieff Rd., Perth, Scotland.

BROOKS J. J. 6 Longford Crescent, St. Thomas, Swansea, W. Glam.

CHRISTIE Roy 2 Troon Court, Forham St Martin, Suffolk IP28 6TU.

CRATHERN Arthur H. 99 Barrow Close, Winchmore Hill, London N21.

GRANGER Walter G. 39 Benacre Road, Ipswich, Suffolk IP3 9JX.

HIGH D. 23 Grassington Close, Pennine Way, Bramsholme, Hull.

HOLMAN Robert S. 65 Walton Road, Sidcup, Kent DA14 4LL.

HUSKINS Arthur 11 Syndale Grove, Normanton, W. Yorks. WF6 1SU.

JONES Charles K. 14 Ash Grove, The Leys, Vann Rd., Fernhurst, Hazelmere, Surrey.

LUDFORD Harry 25a Wellington Ave., Whitley Bay, Tyne & Wear.

MIDDLETON Chris. Tara, Ashford Rd., Harrietsham, Maidstone, Kent.

PACEY Frederick 3 Weir Road, Chertsey, Surrey KT16 8NF.

PLUMB Cyril C. 321 High Barns, Ely, Cambs. CB7 4RW.

POWELL Jeffrey The Old Vicarage, Briningham, Melton Constable, Norfolk.

REVELL Edward J. 70 Westbury Road, Cleethorpes, S. Humberside.

SLAVIN P.M. Capt. Costa Rica 2019, Carrasco, Montevideo, Uruguay.

SUMNER Roy Greycoote, Bishopswood Ave., Prestatyn, Clwyd LL19 9PL.

TASKER Harry 23 Charter Street, Rochdale, Lancs OL16 4UD.

TOWERSEY Keith 133 Crabtree Lane, Harpenden, Herts AL5 5RQ.

TOWNLEY Mm. A. 9 Southwick Avenue, Porchester, Fareham, Hants PO16

WILLIAMS Edgar M. 87 Olive Road, Coxford, Southampton SO1 6FT.

WRIGHT Alex. 377 Alcester Rd S., Kings Heath, Birmingham.

CHANGES OF ADDRESS:

O'BRIEN T. 1 Castle Close, Milford on Sea, Hants.
ROBINSON W. Cheslyn, Church House Drive, off Coleshill St.,
Sutton Coldfield West Midlands B72 1SQ.
STEED C. 74 Tillingdown Hill, Caterham, Surrey CR3 6QL.
TANNER F. 105 Applegarth Park, Seasalter Lane, Seasalter, Kent.

ADD TO 'SHIPMATES ROLL CALL'

AGAMEMNON: R.S.Holman ANSON: E.J.Revell AVENGA: A.H.Crathern
BERWICK: J.Black BELFAST: E.M.Williams CASSANDRA: C.C.Plumb
CHILTERN: J.Brooks COPELAND: C.Hind CUMBERLAND: C.Middleton; R.Sumner
DENBIGH CASTLE: W.Griffeths EMPIRE SCOTT: E.J.Ballard HARDY: A.Huskins
HYDERABAD: H.Tasker LONDON: E.J.Revell MILNE: K.Atmore
MUSKETEER: D.W.Baker MYNGS: E.M.Williams NAIRANA: R.S.Holman
NENE: J.Fogg ORWELL: E.L.Bennett PALOMARES: J.Hayes
PEACOCK: W.G.Granger QUEEN: C.K.Jones RIPLEY: E.M.Williams
SHEFFIELD: D.W.Baker TRACKER: H.Ludford; J.W.Powell
TREHATA: C.Hind TRUMPETER: H.Ludford BLACK PRINCE: D.High

AMEND PREVIOUS LISTS AS FOLLOWS:

G.W.Smith (Moreton, Wirral) should read A.C.Smith.
F.Eyres should read F.Eyers.
D.Cotterell should read D.Cottrell.
Vessel ELORIENT should read EL ORIENTE.
C.Hind's address should read 32 Hawthorne Bank.
Vessel LOCUS should read LOTUS.
G.Couzins (HMS Meteor initial should read S.Couzins.) (Stanley)

S T O P P R E S S .

ADD TO SHIPMATES ROLL CALL

KING GEORGE V: E. Whyte.

CROSSED THE BAR. We have just received delayed notification that shipmate Leonard Craske, 'crossed the bar' last year. Leonard from Wickford, Essex served aboard 'OBEDIENT'.

HON. SECRETARY:

C.B.Tye,
5 Begonia Avenue,
Gillingham,
Kent ME8 6YD.

EDITOR:

R.D.Squires,
28 Westbrook Road,
Gateacre,
Liverpool, Merseyside L25 2PX.

The run was to be made in almost total darkness but 825 was a 'night-flying' squadron, on their own they would have to provided all the air power and bad weather was forecast.

28 December: "VINDEX" sailed from Clyde for Scapa Flow with her escorts.

31st December: Sailed at noon with "DIADEM" and six ships of the 23rd Destroyer Flotilla, to rendezvous with JW63, which had left Loch Ewe on the 30th bound for Kola. Swordfish took off at 0220 as U-boats were reported ahead.

1st January: Convoy sighted and "VINDEX" took up her station in the box at the tail of the convoy. There were 36 merchantmen including 4 ammunition ships, four tankers and two escort oilers some of which were old friends, the escorts consisted of the sloops "CYGNET", "LARK" and "LAPWING" all old hands at the Russian Run, with them the destroyers "WESTCOTT", "WALKER" and the corvettes "ALNWICK CASTLE", "ALLINGTON CASTLE" and "BAMBURGH CASTLE".

2nd January: "VINDEX" crossed the Arctic Circle and all of the new boys were presented with their Order of the Blue Nose.

3rd January: Unidentified aircraft were picked up about 19 miles from the convoy and another Bogey got within six miles of the ships, two Wildcats were flown off but found nothing and returned to "VINDEX", as they flew over "SCORPION" it opened up with its armament but luckily missed.

5th January: The convoy entered the U-boat area and Swordfish aircraft patrolled ahead and astern, one of these aircraft crashed on landing, flying then continued until the 7th when the weather closed in and stopped all further flying.

7th January: Russian escorts came out to meet the convoy and "VINDEX" with four of the Fleet destroyers steamed ahead and entered Kola Inlet, anchoring at N° 48 berth, it was the first time a convoy had reached Russia without a single brush with the enemy

11th January: "VINDEX" with her escorts sailed, including the destroyers "ZAMBESI", "ZEBRA", "WALKER" and "WESTCOTT" to escort RA63 home. U-boats reports came in before the ships were properly formed up, escorts made depth-charge attacks and in the darkness the convoy made a 90° turn led by the commodore in S.S."BRITISH RESPECT". "VINDEX" aircraft were already aloft on patrol and at 1300 the last aircraft to land hit the barrier and it took until about 1800 to repair it. By this time the weather had closed in and all aircraft were recalled. The cold front stretched from North Cape across to Spitzbergen right in front of the convoy, more depth-charge attacks were made on U-boat contacts and visibility was down to 300 yards. With heavy south-west gales reported and rising seas everything was lashed down, by now the ship was rolling badly and the lashed aircraft slipped and lifted a wheel as the ship rolled to port or starboard. The gale with all its fury struck out of the south-west and the rolling pitching lines of ships ploughed on.

12th January: Speed was reduced to allow stragglers to catch up.

13th January: No flying, but three Wildcats were kept on the flightdeck in readiness.

14th January: Hit by another fierce gale and with thickening snow the convoy turned beam on to the worsening seas, "VINDEX" recorded a 33° roll with damage to ships fittings and minor injuries to some crew members. The American S.S."AMASA DELANO" took on a 20° list when her ballast shifted and at one time was in danger of sinking, the convoy altered course to help her, but this put them near North Cape and the torpedo bombers. The S.S."AMASA DELANO" corrected her list and regained her station.

15th January: The gale moderated a little and U-boat contacts were made about 30 miles away, two Swordfish were flown off but returned in two hours in worsening weather having found nothing, later in the forenoon a warning from Iceland forecast a hurricane, again everything was lashed and the ships steamed on hoping for the best. The American S.S."JOHN GIBBON" dropped out of line with condenser trouble and one escort stood by her. the British tanker "LONGWOOD" was also in trouble, all generators

were out of action and one of her furnaces had collapsed, she could only steer with great difficulty. During the "Last Dog Watch" the hurricane struck the convoy and speed was reduced to seven knots, by 2100 "VINDEK" was hove to and rolled 38° with the wind recorded at 80 knots. Waves broke over the catwalks and several stranded fish were seen there, ton upon ton of water fell on her flightdeck, water flooded through her fresh air systems into the messdecks etc., the wardroom piano broke loose and smashed across the deck and tables sheared off, in the messdecks there was chaos, stools hurtled across the decks with men desperately trying to dive into their hammocks - the only safe place. Water, broken crockery and articles of clothing sloshed around and above the messdeck and toolboxes and gear slammed across the hangar.

17th January: The convoy was scattered all over the Norwegian Sea, it was at this time that it was discovered that a rum cask in the spirit room had broken loose and had smashed into others and broaching them, the spirit room deck was awash with a mixture of rum, whisky and gin and the smell was sweeping through the entire ship. There was a long line of volunteers to clear up the spirit room armed with anything that would hold liquid, this cocktail that swilled around was condemned as it had dissolved the red lead on the deck. It was pumped out over the side and it was later said that any stragglers astern could find "VINDEK" by the smell, as this liquid was pumped over the side fannies and buckets were dangled over the side and from the catwalks above in the hopes of catching some of it. The convoy was scattered and "VINDEK" pressed on at 10 knots and overtook the main group about 30 miles from Thorshavn. All ships arrived safely at Thorshavn and on the 20th January left for Scapa Flow, where 825 Squadron flew off to Machrihanish.

AND NOW, FROM THE WARTIME PRESS - THE SUNDAY POST, JUNE 26, 1944.

TOTAL U-BOAT FAILURE IN ARCTIC BATTLE

Three of a strong force of U-boats which attempted to attack a valuable convoy proceeding to North Russia were sunk by the combined action of our ships and naval aircraft.

In addition, six enemy aircraft which attempted to shadow the convoy and to direct U-boats to the attack were shot down by naval fighter aircraft. The convoy got through without damage.

An Admiralty communique telling the story says that the engagement took place within the Arctic Circle during April, but for reasons of security it has not been desirable to release details until now.

The escort was under the command of Vice Admiral F.H.G. Dalrymple-Hamilton in "DIADEM". The aircraft operated from the escort carriers "ACTIVITY" and "TRACKER". First contact with the enemy was made by "STARLING" and "MAGPIE" who made a series of depth-charge attacks and deep underwater explosions were heard and afterwards oil and much evidence of destruction rose to the surface.

Later a Swordfish from "ACTIVITY" sighted a U-boat surfacing at a distance of about six miles. While closing to attack, the Swordfish reported the enemy's position and an Avenger and Wildcat from "TRACKER" flew to assist. The U-boat engaged the Swordfish with gunfire, but the enemy was sunk by supporting aircraft.

The operations by ships and aircraft prevented the U-boats from making any attack on the convoy which reached its destination without loss or damage.

The only loss suffered by our forces was one Wildcat forced down on to the sea by gunfire from a U-boat. The pilot was picked up by one of the escorts. "TRACKER" was one of the first U.S. Carriers received under Lease-Lend. "ACTIVITY" has not been publicly mentioned by the Admiralty before. Her Captain, Guy Willoughby is a specialised air pilot, and early in the war served in "GLORIOUS".

Now, near to the end of the war in Europe, but there is still work to be done by the Carriers:

OPERATION 'CLEAVER':

On 7th May 1945 "QUEEN" set course for the Skaggerak in company with "NORFOLK" (Vice Admiral MagGregor), "SEARCHER", "TRUMPETER" and destroyers "SCOURGE", "SAVAGE", "OPPORTUNE", "CARYSFORT", "ZAMBESI", "ZEST" "OFFA" and the R.F.A. "TORTOL". On the 8th May (VE Day but hostilities did not end until midnight) fighter and anti-submarine cover was given to the sweepers of 40th Minesweeping Flotilla clearing channels to Copenhagen for "BIRMINGHAM", "DIDO", "ZEPHYR", "ZEALOUS" and "OBEDIENT" to accept the surrender of the German Fleet there. The swept channels were marked by danlayers "TAHAY" and "TOCAGAY". 853 Squadron flew 12 Avenger sorties during the day, maintaining two aircraft continuously on patrol. One Avenger, piloted by Sub.Lieut Davis, sighted a formation of JU 52s which were displaying the sign of surrender and another, piloted by Sub.Lieut Barnes, fired a short burst at a Dornier flying boat. The squadron's Wildcats flew 18 sorties during the day. The carrier force stayed outside the mine-fields of the Skaggerak. At the end of the day the force set course for Scapa Flow arriving on the 10th.

OPERATION 'TIMELESS':

"QUEEN" sailed from Scapa Flow on 14th May 1945, in company with "ORIBI" and "OFFA", to escort JW67 to Russia. Although the war in Europe had ended it was thought that some U-boats might not have heard of, or would not observe the cease fire. The convoy consisted of 26 merchant vessels with 11 escort ships. The convoy was closed on 15th May. Over the next six days 34 Avenger and 22 Wildcat sorties were flown maintaining almost continuous anti U-boat patrols up to 100 miles ahead of the convoy. A Russian escort joined the convoy on 20th May and took part of the convoy on to Molotorsk while "QUEEN" anchored in the Kola Inlet.

On 21st the ship was visited by 9 Russian Officers from the Vaenga base and 15 officers and 50 ratings from Archangel. The film 'Bathing Beauty' was screened in the hangar. On the 22nd a concert was given by the Red Navy Choir in the hangar. Shore leave was granted on 22nd and 23rd.

"QUEEN", with "ONSLow" and "OBDURATE" sailed from Kola on the evening of 23rd and immediately commenced anti U-boat patrols continuing throughout the night during which convoy RA67 was joined. A further contingent of ships from Archangel brought the number up to 25. The uneventful convoy arrived in U.K. on 29th May.

During the brief life of 853 Squadron - just 18 months - the following was achieved:

- Flew 5065 hours.
- Operated from 3 Escort Carriers
- Escorted 2 convoys to Russia and back.
- Sighted 2 U-boats, attacking one with acoustic depth charge.
- Took part in 5 operations against the enemy in Norway.
- Flew 297 operational sorties.
- Made 1,197 deck landings, 94 at night.
- The deck landings were made at a cost of 7 significant accidents an accident rate of less than 1%.
- Only 2 accidents occurred during take-offs from carriers.

" C A R R I E R S "

By Bill Johnston, ex-'TRACKER'.

'Victorious', 'Illustrious' and 'Ark Royal',
All carriers well known throughout the Fleet,
'Tis not of them I write, though proud their names,
But of a lesser breed, and fame discreet.

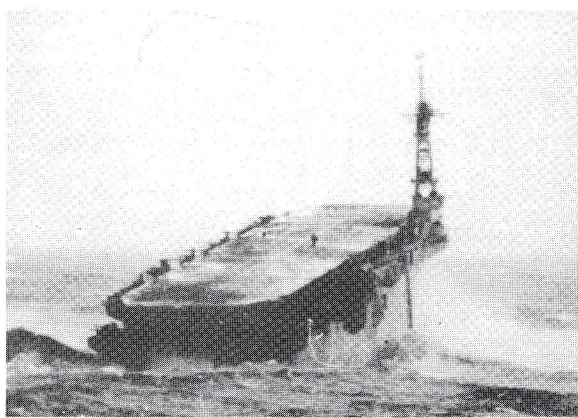
They called them Escort Carriers, by class,
Or Woolworths, much more popular, indeed,
Small Flat Tops, made for rough and ready work,
On convoy guard, and not too high on speed.

Atlantic convoys saw them plough along,
Covering the gap where U-Boats lurked in wait,
Their aerial eyes detected them on high,
And sent them scuttling off, or to a mortal fate.

The dreaded Russian run, another fearsome chore,
Ice laden seas, and awesome Arctic gales,
Yet they flew off their planes, to search and seek,
Pitching and rolling like ungainly whales.

Think of their names, 'Nairana', 'Vindex' too,
'Biter' and 'Archer', 'Campania' and 'Attacker',
'Nabob' and 'Chaser', and so many more,
'Fencer' of course, and my old ship, the 'Tracker'.

With Escort Groups we combed the oceans wide,
And fought the common strife, success our goal,
Sometimes no luck, at other times we won,
And proudly claim our place on honour's roll.



"NAIRANA" HITS ANOTHER MILESTONE.

(This photograph was subsequently published in the Daily Mirror)
(Photograph loaned by Charles Fowler)

"NAIRANA" SPEAKS

On the right is a reduced size cover of "NAIRANA"s Ships Magazine. The we received recently was full of news, posers, competitions, ideas and just a little 'lamp swinging' How's this for an example?

HUN LOSSES MOUNT AS "NAIRANA" GOES INTO ACTION.

Even with the greatest modesty in the world - and we Nairanians are nothing if not modest - the successes of our aircraft against the enemy over, on and under the water and receiving National recognition in the press, and even the refined and dulcet tones of dulcet tone of the B.B.C. have sung our praises. Do we turn a hair? Not we. With a modest blush on our cheeks we set out to do some more. After all, what are a few Germans to us?

Perhaps, whilst in a moment of retrospect, we might think of the number of our successes that can be revealed to date. These are by no means inconsiderable. The set back to the Germans at this stage of the war, caused by our activity, should not be minimised. And if we can say that these have contributed in some small way towards the ending of this war and towards the total defeat of Nazism and its associated obscenities, we will feel less inclined to 'drip' at the various discomforts we sometimes have to undergo.

Not only have we successfully protected convoys. Not only have we struck at the enemy in his own territory, we have also found time to make history in the annals of flying. The night landing carried out by Lieutenant Burgham in a Wildcat was the first ever in this type of fighter. It required nerve to do it. Nerve and skill not only on the part of the pilot but on the part of the Deck Landing Control Officer. Both succeeded. But not only was the event historical - it was practical as well - the Luftwaffe turned tail and fled.

A short time ago someone remarked to the writer that "NAIRANA" was the "ARK ROYAL" of Escort Carriers. Indeed a great compliment. Can we live up to it? We can but try.

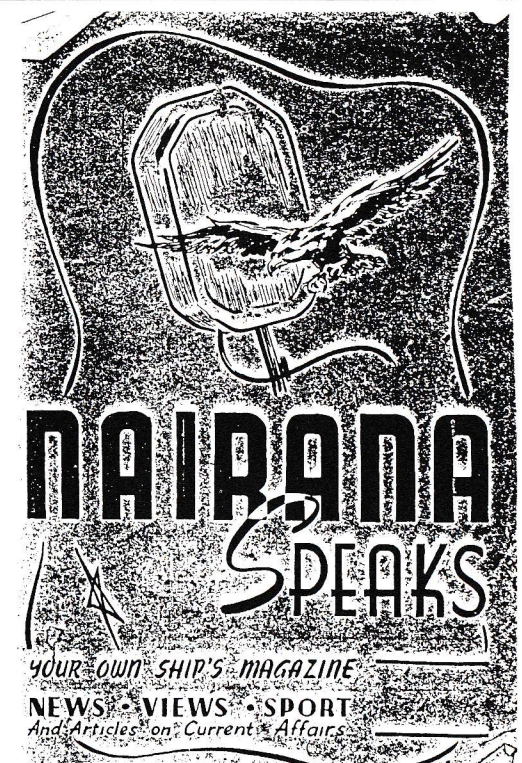
FROM FORE AND AFT: The Admiralty announce classes during working hours to train serving men in post war jobs - future charladies we assume?

A matelot likes his food, his tot; his tot before his food, preferably, as he then becomes indifferent to the quality of the latter.

We're all wet - we drip about our pay - our bubbly and excess canteen profits.

A matelot multiplied any given number of times, can always be divided into one pusser bathroom

"NAIRANA SPEAKS" was edited by Leading Coder P.C. Hornby.



THE PILGRIMAGE TO MURMANSK: 6TH TO 13TH JUNE, 1989

Space does not permit a full report, similar to the 20 pages that were published following the 1988 visit. However, all who participated without exception, have said that it was a complete success. It is hoped that occasionally in Northern Light, you will read some of the stories and experiences, meanwhile, just a precis of events.

Saturday 6th June. 32 participants assembled at Gatwick, boarded plane at scheduled time, but take-off delayed for some 80 minutes. Reasons stated to be "Air Traffic Control". Despite late arrival at Leningrad arrangements at Hotel Moskva, on Nevsky Prospect on the banks of the River Neva were satisfactory. For many, their first ever Russian meal.

Sunday 7th June. A morning visit to the Hermitage and Winter Palace. No one was ready to leave, despite 2½ hours of guided tour. Then we nearly lost one person amongst the runners in a Red Army Marathon Race. After lunch, a city tour including a stop at the cruiser Aurora, followed by a very moving wreath laying ceremony at Piskarovskoye War Cemetery. Our wreath of poppies (which had travelled very well from U.K.) was laid by Henry Baker and Leo Spring. A free evening - some went to the Kirov Ballet, some to the Metro, others to see the graves of Russia's famous musicians. Three went for a Sunday evening stroll down Nevsky Prospect - but that's another story which undoubtedly will be told one day!!!

Monday 8th June. Morning flight to Murmansk. (Is anyone brave enough to tell the story of the big bang?) A fantastic welcome at the foot of the plane's gangway. Representatives of the City Council, Veterans, Teachers, Students and even airport staff. But most of all - the young children, full of enthusiasm and happiness. (we were to see them again later in the week). After lunch in the Arktika we were met by English speaking students who spent the afternoon with us (and the evening in some cases) showing us around their city's highlights. Read Henry Baker's story on a following page.

Tuesday 9th June. Victory Day. The day's story will be told in detail at a later date - Ladies laying flowers on Lenin's Memorial, all of us taking part in the latter stage of the Victory March (7½ miles is a bit too far!) all of us marching behind the "Convoy Participants, 1941-1945" laurel wreath and proudly flying the Union Flag, White, Red and R.A.F. Ensigns, the Canadian Flag and Red Banner. The laying of the wreath by Captain E.A.S. Bailey R.N. Then, the voyage down the Kola Inlet to lay a wreath near 'Bluebell'. An ex-Bluebell crew member casting a small bunch of bluebells on the water, having nursed them all the way from Hampshire. The meal onboard, the concert, the dancing (or was it Jiving?), the voyage back and finally the fireworks display after the evening meal.

Wednesday 10th. A city tour, a visit to the British War Cemetery and another poppy wreath from U.K., placed on the grave of young John Anderson, a 16 year old Stewards Boy from S.S.'Induna'. Then the visit to N°51 School and the lovely concert by the children, ages from 6 to 19 - this was a 'tour highlight' for many of the ladies in our party.

Thursday 11th. More a.m. visits to friends and 'friendly strangers' followed, after lunch with a visit to the Teachers Training College - this visit has become an annual event with it's samovar tea - long may it continue. An evening with veterans (and the cognac bottles) for some, with sea cadets for others, and early to bed for those who were feeling the strain, and those who realised what was to happen in the morning!

Friday 12th. A very early start for the flight to Moscow, yet still we were accompanied by one of the teachers who had greeted us on our arrival. A two and a half hour flight before breakfast at Moscow's Domestic Airport. Then after lunch the usual sightseeing in Red Square and the city. A few still had the energy to go to the Bolshoi or the Circus, or even shopping via the Metro. Others just 'threw in the towel' and said "That's Enough". I would have said the same, but how could I, as tour leader? Anyway there was still some rum in the flask!

Thanks for being a happy, obedient and tolerant ship's company. It was my pleasure having you on the Pilgrimage.

R.D.S.

LAUGH OF THE MONTH

NICKNAMES: How could any tour, any voyage, or any gathering of ex-servicemen take place without the creation of nicknames? Our trip was no exception to the rule:

"THE MAN WITH THE IRON MONKEY" Harold Hewitt our video cameraman, who was known as MR. M.G.M. last year, received his new title because of the large, vicious looking 'animal' that was continually perched on his shoulder. Do Iron Monkeys only eat magnetic tape, Harold?

"THE MAN WITH THE PLASTIC PARROT" the name given to Henry Barrett, another videoman, who's pet, whilst also perched on his shoulder, appeared to be much tamer and easier to handle.

"THE STEAM "PIGEONS" the name finally chosen for the two crew-members of a carrier borne aircraft. They name graduating from "AIRY FAIRIES", to the "HEAVENLY TWINS", before finally becoming the "STEAM PIGEONS"

"IM UPSTAIRS". The name for John McNulty, the man who lives in a Scottish Lighthouse.



Having you up before me as a defaulter will do the
ship's company's morale the world of good . . .
Master-at-arms!

THE N. R. C. PILGRIMAGE TO MURMANSK 1989.

I will not dwell on the various visits to museums and other events so no doubt there will be other contributions from club members. I would like to recount my personal experience. As you will recall, after our 1988 visit Uncle Dick suggested "Why not get your grand-children to form a Pen-friend Club"? My two grand-daughters, Katy 14 and Joanna 12, grasped the opportunity with eagerness. Consequently, they have both been writing ever since then. Before this latest journey I was told: "Whatever you do Grandad, please try to contact our friends".

During the flight to U.S.S.R. I wondered however would I meet these two girls. Would they be waiting at the hotel? Would I have to jump into a taxi and find out where they lived? - I knew the address. When we arrived at Murmansk's Arktika Hotel quite a little gathering was waiting to greet us and I noticed two rather anxious looking girls with a photograph of my Joanna. The excitement I felt at actually meeting these two lovely girls so soon after my arrival is difficult to put into words. But I do mean lovely girls.

Well, we sat down and we chatted and tried to make each other understand - a little bit confusing at times - but we progressed. And as the old maxim says - love conquers all.

Zhanny is 14 and her sister Lily 19 and Lily had a most fascinating way of before saying anything she used to say "Oh Henry" which always brought a smile to my face. Moments later Lily said "Oh Henry" to which I replied, "Yes Lily?". She said, "Would you care to go for a walk?" Eagerly I said "Yes, I'd love to go for a walk". So off we toddled and can you imagine it -I couldn't- a hairy old ex-matelot walking down the main street of Murmansk with a pretty young Russian girl on each arm? Hooray for Glasnost. Anyway, they took me to a milk bar, bought me a whacking great ice cream and a glass of cold milk and believe you me, I thoroughly enjoyed it. That made my day. And if you didn't already know, milk is more nourishing than vodka.?

They invited me to meet their family on the Tuesday evening, which I accepted, but unfortunately we were so late back from the Kola cruise that consequently I missed them, so I'm afraid we were doomed to disappointment.

However I did meet the girls again. This was at the Teachers' College where they are students. I had only just sat down at the reception when Dick came up to me with a broad grin on his face and saying, "Come with me". He dragged me down to the other end of the hall where my two little friends were waiting. You can guess - another reunion and great excitement for the remainder of the afternoon.

Before saying our goodbyes, they absolutely weighed me down with presents to take home. Actually it was embarrassing to think how much money they must have spent on the various little gifts they had given me. I suppose that is the true meaning of friendship and affection.

All I have in mind now is to look forward to next years Pilgrimage to Murmansk. If this is Glasnost, to me it was an experience of a lifetime.

As for you Dick, without your great effort in organising our trips, this would never have happened to me. Many thanks.

Dosvedanya.

Henry (Pash) Baker.