

HMS Phoebe
Association
Newsletter
April 2011



I'm a new Member
NO SILLY! I'm not a stoker
I'm a BEAR

Good day everyone, its the second week of March and the sun has decided to show itself and to bring a slight warmth with it. We are off to Blackpool in a fortnight for the FNA Reunion, hoping for the weather to hold good.

Although it is some time now since the disaster in Japan and other areas of the Pacific Basin, the after effects are still with them, and I am sure you all join with me in offering our best wishes to all the people.

Lil and I were worried for a family of children we sponsor in the Philippines, but they live above Manila on high ground so they are OK.

Reunion:

There are no rooms vacant at the hotel, I think this may mean we have taken about 95% of rooms, so we could be seeing just us at the hotel? Don't forget the hotel has a very good indoor swimming pool, also a Jacuzzi and Sauna, both in the pool area. If you are inclined make sure you pack your swim suit, (unfortunately skinny dipping is out)!

We have invited guests to dinner on Saturday night,so there will be a head table for one night only. The guests are well known to us all.

Although we usually dress for dinner, it is still optional. However for this one night may **we request that you be seated by 6.50pm**, the reason for this will be explained at the AGM. There will be the usual two raffles during the weekend, raffle prizes are gratefully accepted. Profit from the raffles held at reunions go towards the extra costs incurred at these events. The treasurer wishes to remind you that your full reunion payment must be received by her during April, preferably before the end of the month, so that she can arrange for the group payment to the hotel.

Coach Trip: There are 6 seats vacant on the coach, we now have a 35 seater on hire and only 29 customers. Please let me know within the next two weeks if you want to go. I have to book tickets for the Tank Museum Don't forget; if you are an ex-service veteran **please make sure you have your vets badge on view**. For those who are not ex-forces we will obtain tickets under a group booking..

Due to the massive fuel charges and other increases the coach trip will be £3 pp, and will be collected on the coach. (Correct amount if possible please).

The treasurer asks me to remind you that the Association accounts are always available for inspection by any shipmate after an AGM.

Some later day sayings derived from naval phrases.

Clean bill of health - This widely used term has its origins in the "Bill of Health", a document issued to a ship showing that the port it sailed from suffered from no epidemic or infection at the time of departure.

Cut and run - To cut and run an expression often thought to imply the cutting of a hemp cable with an axe, thus abandoning an anchor, when a ship needed to get quickly under way in an emergency. The more accurate origin of the saying was at anchor in an open roadstead, of furling their sails with them stoppered to the yards with ropeyarns, so that the yarn's could be cut and the sails let fall when the need to get under way quickly was urgent.

Chewing the Fat - "God made the vittles but the devil made the cook," was a popular saying used by seafaring men in the 19th century when salted beef was staple diet aboard ship. This tough cured beef, suitable only for long voyages when nothing else was cheap or would keep as well (remember, there was no refrigeration), required prolonged chewing to make it edible. Men often chewed one chunk for hours, just as it were chewing gum and referred to this practice as "chewing the fat."

As the Crow Flies - When lost or unsure of their position in coastal waters, ships would release a caged crow. The crow would fly straight towards the nearest land thus giving the vessel some sort of a navigational fix. The tallest lookout platform on a ship came to be known as the crow's nest.

An albatross around your neck - Seafarers long believed that when their captains died, their souls took the form of an albatross to wander the oceans forever. As a species, the albatross is a gliding phenomenon. In its larger versions, it can circumnavigate the globe, sometimes aloft for several days at a time, spending only about 10% of its time on land. If the captain in question was a nice sort of guy, great, but this was not usually the case. As a general rule, the image painted of Captain Bligh is closer to the truth than the idea of a benevolent dictator. Many sailors believed that their old captains came back to taunt them even after death, settling to rest by draping itself around the neck and shoulders of one hapless crewman or another. It is for this reason that it was always thought to be a harbinger of ill luck.

Limeys - In 1795 the issue of lime juice aboard British naval ships was regularised to prevent scurvy amongst sailors. British naval ships are still required to carry lime juice and American sailors persist in calling British sailors limeys.

Bournemouth Town Council news

In 1998 the Association renewed the ships adoption ties with Bournemouth. We met with the Mayor in the Mayors Parlour for tea and biscuits. after exchanging items of memorabilia, and receiving from the Mayor a copy of the official adoption certificate, the original hung in the hallway outside the meeting room which was by the way named the Phoebe Room. We were shown around the room, there were some photos and a couple of objects hung on the walls, also there was a ships bell from off the Frigate, whether it was brass we do not know as it had been either silver plated or chromed. I was given the opportunity to ring four bells on it, I was going to ring eight but the bell was not hung properly and the sound of four bells was so tinny I decided not to ring eight. Jumping ahead now to the year 2011 we find the Phoebe room has been redecorated and all the items of memorabilia removed, it was boxed up and is now in the possession of the TS Phoebe, and will find a place in their new Head Quarters when it is built. But the bell was not included?

A ships bell holds a certain amount of significance to its crew, and I feel that the bell should have been surrendered to the Association, and we could pass it on to the TS, where it will be used as it should be used.

The bell will either sit in the Town Hall cellar gathering dust or some bright spark will place it on Ebay.

But all is not yet lost!

The TS are requesting the surrender of the bell and they are being backed up by our friend Emily.

I have also sent two letters, one to the Mayors Office and one to the Councils Chief Exec' requesting that the bell, because of its significance to the Association and its shipmates, it be surrendered to us. If we, or the TS, do not get any joy from our requests we will jointly take it further.

Tomorrow morning we are off to the FNA Reunion in Blackpool. The hotel is not a large one, only 50 rooms, and is situated a short walk from the Pleasure Beach, I will while we are there "suss it out", its further away than we are used to, but could it still be a venue? Shep Wooly is entertaining, may be able to find out his tariff for future reference, last time I checked we had no chance of paying his bill which included accommodation and travel costs. I read about the budget increase on beer and fags, glad I gave both up 3 years ago. Now I can almost afford to buy Lil a birthday card. (If I can remember what the date is)??

We are back home now from another successful FNA weekend, not at a holiday camp this time but a hotel overlooking the sea, most of the comfortable bedrooms had a sea view, car parking was to the rear and front of the hotel with plenty of spaces. The Pleasure Beach was a bit too far for Lil and I to reach walking, but it was not fully open anyway, the same goes for the rest of Blackpool at this time of year, so there was not a lot to do or see, even the tramway was closed, and there was lots of diversions round road-works. We did a bit of touring instead. My daughter did nearly all of the driving, so we got round pretty fast?? Our trip up was easy, I had decided not to use the M6 toll road, it saved us £5.50 going up and another & 5.50 coming down. I thought we would get held up at the usual M6 trouble spots, but amazingly for a Friday and Monday traffic was light, and we maintained a good 70-90 both ways. The hotel entertainment was quite good although there was no dance floor. On Saturday night it was Shep Woolly's turn, he was quite good some of his jokey stories were a bit drawn out, none of his act was racist or dirty, and he got a good response from the audience, whether he would be good for us I'm not sure, his act was in two parts, two hours then after an interval another hour. I did find out that his normal charge for a reunion was £300, I suppose

that is the going rate for this type of act. The only thing I find about this type of act is interference from the audience, there is always some one in the background talking loudly which mars the enjoyment of others. We enjoyed the weekend and hope that next year we will be able to attend again. There is as yet no venue, but Torquay was mentioned?

I am waiting for a call from our hotel regarding the Saturday night dinner, hopefully before this newsletter gets printed..

Shipmate Stuart Bundy and wife Yvonne, who always attends our memorial on Remembrance Sunday informs me they will not be able to this year. Stuart always lays our wreath at the towns memorial, if another shipmate does not volunteer we will ask if a sea cadet can do the honour. We always ask for shipmates to attend the ceremony, and although there are shipmates who reside not too far away only three, who live miles away, turn up each year, luckily they bring their wives and sometimes relatives to the venue. Last year we all got a good soaking, we hope this year the weather will be kinder, or at least not wet.

“As Time Goes By”

The living conditions in Chatham Naval Barracks in 1943 at the time I was waiting to get my first ship were deplorable. Because of the number of ships that had been lost in action there were 4000 occupying space intended for 1000. Under normal circumstances there would have been space to sling your hammock to get a nights sleep but this was not the case. In consequence we took every opportunity to take shore leave when at liberty to go into Chatham Town to seek a bed in either the Sailors’ Home or the Salvation Army Hostel or a bed in a private house. The basic rate for the luxury was one shilling and six pence a night that included bed and a cup of tea in the morning. Those of us who were lucky enough to enjoy these facilities will be ever grateful to those who provided them. There was another problem attached to getting one of those beds. After being inspected before leaving barracks, there was a mad rush to get onto the buses to make the short journey into Chatham. This was a trial of strength and we took no prisoners, needless to say the buses were so overcrowded you could hardly breathe. On arrival it was essential that you could do a hundred yards in around ten seconds for the last part of the journey to this small heaven.

On one of the occasions my friend Shorty Smith and I had found our way to Chatham where we were to experience a night to remember.

We were proceeding along a back street on our way to our regular lodgings. The street resembled what we now know as ‘Coronation Street’. It was narrow with houses on both sides. The pavement was about two feet wide and the front doors located so that you stepped directly into the front room on entering.

It was from one of these doors we were suddenly faced by a little old lady who seemed to appear from nowhere. She stood about five feet and was dressed in a black dress which about covered her little black buckle shoes. Around her neck was a lace collar and a large brooch holding it in place. Her hair was brushed back off her face with a bun at the back. At seeing her, I was immediately reminded of one of my old grandmas who had lived to the wonderful age of 90.

The lady then spoke. “Could you gentlemen do with a good bed for the night, clean sheets and a comfortable mattress and a cup of teas in the morning?” We asked if we could see the accommodation and we stepped into the little front room. There was no bedstead, but there was a bed made up on the floor. “There we are gents, here’s the bed”.

We looked at each other with apprehension. It’s safe to say that if we had been older we might have turned down the proposition. “How much is it mother?” to which she replied “one shilling and sixpence”. This was what we were used to paying and feeling sorry for the poor old soul we agreed to accept. This was our big mistake as we unfortunately found out later.

Having told our landlady that we would return at about 11 o’clock we proceeded to the Sailors’ Home for a meal. The menu was never exciting, but the food was well cooked and certainly better than in the barracks. We thoroughly enjoyed our meal and then decided to visit the cinema called The Empire. The film being shown was ‘Casablanca’, starring Humphrey Bogart and Ingrid Bergman. This was the first showing of this wonderful film, which over 50 years later is considered to be one of the most popular films ever made.

We managed to get a seat with 400 other sailors, none of whom could have imagined the treat we were in for. When the lovely Ingrid appeared on the screen, you could have heard a pin drop. I don't think any of us had seen a film star as beautiful as the young Swedish lady. She didn't need make up, she had that virgin look with eyes that would have melted the heart of the toughest Naval Gunnery Officer and that says it all. Most of the audience had either a wife or a girlfriend at home and for an hour or so Ingrid filled that empty space. When it came to the final scene, when instead of staying with Bogart her lover, she flew off with Paul Hendrick her husband, there was not a dry eye in the house. I'm not ashamed to admit that I was one who was guilty.

The film 'Casablanca' with thousands of other people is my favorite film and I watch a tape of it religiously every year. It brings back memories I shall take with me to my grave. Needless to say, the theme song on the film called 'As time goes by' is one of my favorites. After this memorable experience, Shorty and I made our way to the nearest pub for a couple of pints. When time was called, we found our way back to our lodging. On arrival we were greeted by the little lady who let us in and wished us a goodnight.

There was no mention of toilet facilities so I can only assume these were out of bounds. I think our bladders must have been in better condition than they are today. In the event we could have opened the front door and used the street, as if we would! We undressed with considerable difficulty in the dark and slotted ourselves into bed. The time then was about 11 o'clock. From this time until about half past midnight there was a succession of sailors knocking on the door. This was succeeded by the landlady making her way to the door treading all over our feet to let them in.

Once in, they all trampled over us on the way to the back room, or we know not where. I estimate that after we went to bed up to ten sailors in various stages of intoxication took up residence. You can imagine the language, as Shorty and me showed our disapproval. Came and dawn and we got to drink the welcome cup of tea that was part of the deal we had concluded. Our knees and legs were black and blue with bruises. Not a night I would care to repeat. Obviously the little old lady eventually retired after the war on the proceeds, she certainly was a super sales person and deserved her reward.

Needless to say, we reverted to the more salubrious accommodation we found at the Salvation Army where I'm pleased to say drunkenness was frowned upon.

NB: Saturday evening meet in the bar area around 6.15 pm, Please be seated at your table by 1850, we hope to have a table set up where you will be offered on your way in a tot of Rum, or a glass of Sherry or White Wine for the Toast. Tables will be laid for four and six. Places. (It maybe best to go to the tables you have been using).

Our guests will be Mrs Emily Morrell-Cross. Mr & Mrs Mike Fox, and Padre, Ray Merrick.

We hope everyone enjoys their weekend, and that the weather is kind to us.

I did my Bit??

When I passed my training and became a wren I was immediately posted to Lowestoft. Women were not supposed to serve aboard a sea going ship, but to my amazement, along with a pal we were put aboard a little minesweeper to work alongside men in the engine room. It was hard work mind you, we never let up. One morning me and my mate were summoned on deck. We had to climb up and slide down ladders to get between decks, we wore the same uniform as the men. Well we had to after all there were standards to maintain and the sight of a lady sliding down a ladder in a skirt would have been disruptive for our male colleagues? My mate and I were the only two women on board that ship and as we went on deck we saw the crew lined up for their rum. I sipped from quite a few cups and as you might guess I was quite merry when we went back to the workshop. The chief engineer was furious with us; he could smell the rum on our breath. He even accused us of being drunk on duty. He was an old three striper and was an experienced engineer before the war who had been recalled back into the service. He was not happy about that, and was annoyed that he had not been given any extra rum. I told him I would get him some if he let us have a day off duty, but he refused, so I told him he wouldn't be getting any extra rum then. He wanted to know how I could get rum, but that was my secret and I certainly wasn't about to tell him.

I knew where to get rum and here's how I did it. I left ship and went down to the dockside. Since I was a woman sailors would come up to me and ask me to take two bottles of rum ashore for them. I got one bottle for myself and one to hide away and deliver to the sailor's lodgings. The dock police would confiscate the rum if they found it on a sailor. But me I was able to come to an arrangement where I would buy cigarettes off the sailors on our boat, sell them to the Dock Police for five shillings and in return they would let me go on my way. I paid some of the money to the men on board ship for the ciggies. The police got their ciggies, the chief got his rum and I got my day off. Everyone was happy including my dad who being a former sailor got an occasional bottle of rum, and I got to do my bit for my country? I had good times in Lowestoft and I miss the feeling of the community working all together in hard times. It was special. It was made all the more apparent when I got posted to Northern Ireland.

That community was so divided so insular, for there the community segregated themselves. Women in uniform seemed to have more freedom of movement in Ireland than the men in uniform.