

HMS Phoebe
Association
October
Newsletter



S/m Bill Wilson and two mates with Jean & Mary members of the ENSA concert party.

This short story was sent in by Bill 'Tug' Wilson:-

"I am surprised that there have been no articles sent in of the time Phoebe was in Bombay for a refit. As I remember it the ship's company were split up into two parties and given leave.

The first party were sent into the hill of Kashmir, the second party, to which I was detailed, were sent to a 'Rest Camp' in Deolali, or better known as Doolalli. It was some rest camp I can tell you! The place was little more than a village. We were met at the station by an officious Petty Officer who made us all fall in to be marched to the camp. It was hot, it was dry, and we were fed up! He began to give us a talk on where things were and the activities that had been arranged our stay. We said "thanks, but no thanks". "We are on leave and that's not going to include any organised Activities, we'll see you in two weeks time". Jack was not too happy to see the camp surrounded by many Army camps. But! As you all know Jolly Jack can always make the best of a bad job! So we headed for the nearest village where we found a Chinese store which stocked beer, wine and all things liquid. I think it took us two days to drink the place dry.

Some of the more adventurous of us found we could hire bicycles to explore more watering holes in other villages. We noticed large numbers of soldiers walking in the same direction each evening, being an inquisitive lot we stopped one soldier and learned that each evening different Army camps issued 2 free bottles of beer to each man, on arrival at said camp one simply joined the queue, shuffled along to a hatch in a wall and said bottles were shoved out to you. "Oh a Joy to Behold". We got away with it a couple of times until someone twigged we were sailors and not soldiers, I think it was our white fronts that gave us away, but ever resourceful "Jack" persuaded some soldiers to loan us their khaki shirts for a few minutes and it worked a treat. Towards the end of the first week we noticed men walking in a new direction and a bit earlier than usual, this needed looking into?

The reason was an "ENSA" concert party were putting on a show, we off to it like a shot! There were a couple of comedians and three young female dancers, so very appealing? Actually it was a very good show, and at the end blokes were shouting, whistling and applauding for an encore. Jack Clarkson, Geordie and myself walked straight down the middle of the aisle up onto the stage and through the curtain to the back-stage. Before we were thrown out we walked up to the three girls, found out where they were billeted and made a date to meet them the next day. I have to say we enjoyed three days in the company of those three delectable beauties.

”Well done Jack”. Sadly they moved on to another theatre of war, but we still had the nightly beer scam to fall back on which lasted until it was time to set off back to the station and Bombay dockyard.

We were glad when the refit was over and we could get the ship cleaned up, and back to sea again, and good old Trinco!

This is my small offering in answer to Roys continuous request, so come on lads; lets have some more stories of your Far East exploits.

‘Tug’ (Bill Wilson).

“Thank you Bill, yes! we could do with more of those tales”.

What Did You Do in the RN, Daddy?

Vic Chanter

I haven’t done a great deal of reading during this last 12 months, but, since we have an onsite library two floors down from our apartment, I joined Marjorie, my wife, in her search for her favourite authors. As she browsed, I passed by John Grisham, James Patterson and others whose books I had previously been keen to read, and I thought, I’ve got no time for reading now, there’s too much going on in this place. (Must tell you about it, one day). Then I happened to come across an old favourite author. I thought, I know about most of which he writes. In one book he even gave my name to one of his characters - *I like him* - though he did change the bloke’s rating. You may have guessed that his genre is the Royal Navy: the sort of writing that I could easily take in without too much use of the grey matter. Sort of blasé; been there, done that attitude, because he writes of the old timers’ navy, when we had battlewagons, cruisers, destroyers and such. Whether the action is off Norway, in the Mediterranean or the Pacific it is authentic and explicit, with certain names changed of course. So much so that I found myself nodding in agreement as I read on. I was breathing once more the acrid outflow from the funnel that enveloped the bridge and flag deck. In the midst of the action my senses were blasted with a reassuring mixture of the bursts of friendly pompoms and oerlikons along with the growing, swelling sound of the dreaded shrieks of the dive-bombing Stukas. The author’s name is Alexander Fullerton, who had also been there and done that, and it shows. I began to realise that I knew very little of the modern Royal Navy. It’s too late to worry about that now, but when we started our association and I realised that we had Frigate members to take onboard, I did; worry that is. What happened to the signalmen, telegraphists, stokers, writers et al? I have long since stopped worrying. Though it would have been nice to read about life below decks, above decks and ashore in the newer RN. (There is still time to get it down on paper. ED).

We were fortunate that the girls loved the matelot’s uniform; it gave them an excuse to touch a sailor’s collar for luck. Who’s luck?

FNA (Federation of Naval Associations)

As I have reported before, our Association is a member of the FNA and this entitles all our members to attend events organised by the FNA, especially the annual reunion and AGM. Lil and I have attended four such reunions and have enjoyed everyone of them, not just because bar prices are generally below average, (50p a drink), but also entertainment and sociality is good. I am sent the information regarding the reunions, and also a form for members reservations, this I copy and send to members who want them. The next FNA reunion is on March 25th to March 28th 2011. This time it is in Blackpool!, the hotel is the Warwick Hotel and is at the southern side of the sea front. (I think that is the fun-fair side)? Car parking is within the hotel premises at the rear. Although entertainment on Friday night will be minimal and hardly noticeable above the talking.

Saturday night should be, or so I have been told by some of you! quite an enjoyable evening, for the entertainer is non other than "Shep Wooley". I am quite envious of the price of this 3 night Half- Board weekend.

£105 per person, "**Yes! £105pp**". At this price rooms are going to be snapped up quickly, there are only 51 rooms in the hotel, all en-suite and all accessible by lift, so if you have a mind to enjoy a trip to Blackpool, and enjoy a top variety act, phone me for a form, get in quick. Just £20 pp deposit sent with your form to the FNA is all that is required at present.

Lil, & I, daughter Sharon & hubby Pat are already booked in.

Phone Roy & Lil - 01235 211501. Or Email - r.pavely@ntlworld.com

The following message from S/m Bob Hobbs, although sent privately to me I am sure he will not mind my sharing it with you all. It is to do with a Jackal Armoured Vehicle hit by a Taliband bomb in Helmand on Saturday Sept 20th.

"Andrew Howarth from Bournemouth, who died, was in the same vehicle as my nephew Aaron. Andrew was his best mate. The other soldier with them who died was Sgt Andrew Jones, Royal Engineers (bomb disposal we think). Aaronn was flown back to Selly Oak hospital yesterday, 20th and will be operated on tomorrow, he has spinal, pelvis and hip fractures as well as many large cuts and bruises all over from the explosion. The mental scars of being the only survivor is also worrying!!

I am sure that all shipmates will join Lil and myself in wishing Bobs nephew Aaronn, the sole survivor, a speedy recovery and quick return to full health.

Our Condolences and Sympathy we send to the families of Aaronn's crew..

The following tale is by a young boy remembering the Blitz.

When the Battle of Britain started, I saw little of the dogfights but later in early September the daylight raids on London began. The weather was marvellous with cloudless skies and we stood in the garden after the siren had sounded. Within a short time the sky was criss-crossed with high-flying silver aircraft that looked like toys. We counted about 20 pass over moving towards the centre of London and then we could see smaller silver object falling. These we later realised were bombs. Some barrage balloons were also falling, flaming drunkenly like grotesque dancers. We had no thought of taking shelter and were fascinated by the aerial battle above. We later realised that many of the bombs had fallen on the Woolwich Arsenal and the docks. Later that night the bombers returned again and soon the whole sky was filled with a red glow of the fires that raged in the docks. From our front door, as we looked towards Woolwich and the Arsenal we could see the reflection of the huge fires that had been started further up river. From the first week in September we had continuous day and night raids for about 3 weeks, then the bombers came only at night and we had heavy raids every night until the middle of November. We had bought a Manchester terrier bitch dog during 1938 and after the first few nights she would sense the onset of a raid and let us know by howling at least 20 minutes before the air raid warning went off. During this period each night I would crawl under the dining room table (the shelter was full of water and unusable) praying that I would get through the night.

One night the street was showered with incendiary bombs and my dad with other neighbours who were on night watching duty went outside to deal with one that had fallen in the road. There was my father arguing with a neighbour about the best way to deal with it. Pick it up in a shovel and put it in a bucket or put sand over it and let it burn. He wouldn't have done this later in the war as the Germans began dropping explosive incendiaries.

A number of houses had been hit including that of my friend David

The 2lb bomb had gone through his roof into the front bedroom and his father with the aid of neighbours managed to put most of the fire out from inside. This didn't however stop the AFS rushing round and causing more damage by breaking the top-floor windows and throwing out all his furniture. The next day I found a large 6ft container for all these incendiary bombs in our garden.

One morning we woke up to find an unexploded bomb had fallen into the front garden of a house eight doors away. The street was cleared and we all had to move to a rest centre that had been set up in Plumstead High Street School. There were so many unexploded bombs around that it was impossible for the army to deal with them. Many went off within a few hours and then one could move back. It seemed to me we were in the rest centre for weeks but I know it was only days. The place was crowded and many of the people who were in poor physical and mental condition had come from Silvertown in East London having been bombed out. My father had not been able to get to work for some days. He set off on his bicycle to find what had happened in Bow: he returned to tell us that his factory had been badly bombed and no work was possible. The raids during each night continued and we were all crammed into the basement of the school, which had been strengthened outside with sandbags and bricked-up windows. Local cheer-leaders (including our own Mr Potter) got people singing songs to keep up their courage and take their minds off the destruction taking place outside. After about a week as the bomb in our road had not gone off, my mother decided to chance it and we moved back to our house. The road was still closed to traffic and we were warned that there was still a risk of an explosion. After another week or so others moved back and the bomb was forgotten and the hole was filled in. When we had returned home as my dad was unable to go back to work to his old firm, he was directed for a short time to work on bomb damaged house by covering up the blasted windows and roofs with felt to keep out the rain. Some years later in 1946 after the war had ended an unexploded bomb that had also been forgotten exploded off near the Elephant and Castle killing some children. As a result the numerous undealt-with bombs including our own were dug up and dealt with. In our case the bomb had gone down about 10ft and was still alive.

At this time I was not attending school, as the normal organisation had been disrupted and teachers were not available. I was not getting any proper sleep at night. There were half-time lessons at my old school but there was no compunction to go and I missed some months of vital schooling. My mother decided that I could do with a rest from the bombing and sent me off to live with my Aunt Rose in Burnt Oak. Although this area was still in London and Hendon Airport and the surrounding aircraft factories were targets, the German bombers did not automatically fly over the area on their way to Central London. We heard the sirens each night but it was rare that bombs dropped in the area and I was able to sleep in a bed and

attend the local school without disruption. My aunt was a widow (my Uncle Joe had died in 1940 as the result of wounds he received in the 1st World War) but still had two children of school age, Irene, then aged 15 and Arthur, aged 6 (my cousin Joey was in the army and had gone through Dunkirk). I settled down well and my aunt was easy-going if a bit fussy. She was however liberal with pocket money and trips to the cinema. The first thing she did when I arrived was to take me to Hendon Central WVS Centre where they kitted me out with new clothes on the basis that I had been bombed out. I liked living with my aunt and started school in Burnt Oak. When the teacher introduced me to the class she told them I had been bombed out so I was the centre of attraction for a while. I told them that I came from Dover to increase the attention (everybody had heard of Dover as it was being shelled from France across the Channel but nobody knew of Woolwich) so my teacher was a bit confused. Whilst I lived there a German plane was shot down and placed on view in the site of the present Burnt Oak library and we had to pay a penny to see it. I was doing well at school, but I think my mother was not too happy that I had settled in so easily and after a few months she sent my brother Stan to bring me home.

Although the raids had not ceased, they had decreased in frequency and Stan told me the air raid shelter had been made comfortable with bunk beds and carpet on the floor and a proper front door to keep out the cold. I started back to school and we made the best of the raids by sleeping in the shelter each night. Although we had a number of bombs fall in the vicinity during the "blitz" we were lucky that we lost only windows and a few tiles off the roof. The blast of the bombs was sufficient to rock the foundations of the house and caused a vertical crack to appear in the sidewall. One large bomb, which fell in Churchmanor Way uncovered many graves in St Nicholas Churchyard and scattered bones all over the place. A number of incendiaries failed to ignite or did not completely burn through if they fell on open damp land. My friends and I found one half burnt, which I took home and kept in the garden shed. Later in the war we filed bits off as the filings being made of magnesium could be made into very good fireworks. We never thought about how dangerous this practice was.

The wartime clothes rationing imposed a "make do and mend" attitude on everyone and luckily my mother was very good at knitting and machining. She bought a hand operated circular sock machine so that every scrap of spare wool could be used to an advantage. She made all my school trousers and jumpers until I got into senior school and I often went to school in the

trousers that she had patched but other children were in the same boat so there was little comment. We rarely went out at this time and my family would often sit down to play card games in the evening and Crib was our favourite. My mother was not a very good loser and if my dad were winning, she would protest that he was sitting in her chair and make him change places.

I lived the first 20 years of my life in Burnt Oak, and so did my wife Lil, I was nine when the blitz started, Lil was eight, neither of us can remember a German plane being exhibited on the site where there now stands a Library, in fact that site had a prefabricated British Restauraunt on it for the whole of the war, and for a few more years after as well. It was originally a small playground. I was doing a paper round and some of my customers were bombed out. Planes that over-ran London had to ditch their bombs to make sure they could get home. They did!! Just yards north of Burnt Oak.

NB: British Restauraunts were set up by the Ministry of Food in most towns to feed the workers, the food was mainly of the powdered variety but it was cheap and cheerful. I loved the Vienna Steak, a mixture of mince and god knows what?

Roy.

I was speaking to Mike Fox yesterday evening, the TS Phoebe Chairman, and he tells me that the Sea Cadet Headquarters was broken into, locks and gates sawn off. The engine for their motor launch was taken and lots of other stuff too, luckily the unit is insured, but that does not mean everything will be replaced, it never is.

Mike also asked if any of us will be attending their Trafalgar Night Dinner, some of us used to attend regularly, but I am afraid it became too expensive what with the cost of traveling, an overnight hotel and the dinner itself. Not only that but some of us are RNA members and have Trafalgar Night functions and dinners to attend. Association members are 'far flung' and trying to gather members together for one night has always been a most difficult thing to do, But I would like to say the times Lil and myself attended the TS Phoebe Trafalgar Night Dinner's and the many times we attended the Sea Cadet HQ was most enjoyable, always a warm welcome from staff, and the bar was cheap?! The attendance of the sea cadets at our Memorial on Remembrance Sunday each year is without any doubt greatly Appreciated, our thanks to the staff and cadets knows no bounds. There is another forthcoming event that I am hoping shipmates will make

If this company do prove to make a good job of organising a reunion, it will be put to members at the AGM in May next year whether to take them aboard or not. What part of the country to hold a reunion will still be up to us, the main item to remember is that the IofW Tours do not organise for nothing, probably a percentage of the cost is their fee. A good thing about this company is that they do all the leg-work, when its all organised and a contract agreed, they send out the booking forms, collect the deposits then the remaining payment about two months before the event takes place. The one we are attending on the Isle of Wight is £134 per person for 3 nights HB, and includes the ferry!

The number of members attending reunions is falling each year, if it carries on the costs will be higher, hotels ask for group sizes before pricing a package. The time may come when holding our reunion means we join up with another group, although we have no worries there because the Federation of Naval Associations has that facility, one can hold a reunion within their reunion, and also have your own separate AGM. The reunions are cheaper than we can get because they have more members attending, and because they hold the events around Feb/March/ April time.

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I must be losing my marbles. On Saturday Lil said that I was supposed to get the HMS Sheffield Autumn newsletter finished and posted by Monday, I forgot we had a our latest Great-Grand-Daughters Christening to attend on the Sunday afternoon,so it was a mad rush this morning, (Monday), to get 1590 A4 pages printed, collated, stapled, and posted etc. It took almost four hours to get two thirds of the way through the second part of double sided printing, the copier was getting overheated so I took a short break and checked on how many newsletters were actually wanted, I always tend to print about six too many, this time I wanted it right. After we had agreed on the number I carried on printing, while the copier was churning out the copies I went and checked the number again, I don't know why but I also checked the number on a note I had in my Sheffield Committee box, and that was when I found the old brain must have paused for a rest, because in the box was six copies of HMS Sheffield's Autumn Newsletter. *I HAD ALREADY SENT EVERY MEMBER A COPY TWO WEEKS AGO!!!*

I now had over 1500 sheets of A4 paper for the recycle bin. It was the Phoebe's newsletter that I had to finish and get in the post by the end of this week. The wasted paper was not the issue, its pretty cheap in Tesco, its the copier Toner that is the biggest loss, its certainly not cheap. Roy.

One night of the Coventry Blitz - November 14th. 1940.

I was eight years nine months old. The air raid had started much earlier than usual, the sirens sounding about 7 pm. Dad had gone out to see the streets air raid warden, who told him to 'Get the missus and kids to the shelter this is a big one'. Dad came in and put me in the cubby hole under the stairs, then took my mum and younger brother to the shelter. The bombs were falling quite close by this time and Mr Duck, our neighbour, told my dad to go back and fetch me and he would see mum and my brother got safely to the shelter.

My dad came back and leaned through the door of the cubby hole, he said, 'Come on son, time is short', I was half way out when the air filled with dust and the front door was blown towards us, slowly and perfectly upright. The door hit dad in the back pushing him over on top of me so that we both ended up in the cubby hole, we, neither of us, had heard an Explosion.

The night had started as a perfect autumn evening, bright and cloudless, the moon full and the clear air crisp and fresh. Now the air stank of stale singed dust similar to an old Hoover dust bag. After scrambling out of the cubby hole dad quickly put out the small fire in the parlour, it had been caused by the cinders being thrown out of the grate onto the carpet, this was easily done using the two pans of water that had been left in the fire place. Once that had been done we made our way to the street shelter.

The rest of that night was spent in the shelter, we did not get much sleep, the noise of bombs exploding keeping us awake, yet we did not seem frightened, some others kept saying the same prayers over and over again.

During the night, and a lull in the bombing, my dad had taken me out of the shelter for a quick look at the devastation. Being in the high part of Coventry we could usually see the three famous spires of the Cathedral, but that night all we could see was the smoke, flames and a dull orange glow in the sky. At 6am the all-clear sounded and we left the shelter.

Looking towards the city centre a path cleared through the smoke, we were shocked to see not three spires but only two. While mum escorted me and my brother home, dad went looking to see what shops were open, when we had left the house our larder door was hanging open, dad reckoned all our food would be covered in debris, so he was looking for our breakfast.