



HMS Phoebe



Association

Newsletter

April 2014



Shipmate Jim and Pat Mayer

Here we are again with another newsletter, the weeks seem to fly by, and its not too long now for our reunion at Weston S Mare. Perhaps the rain will have ceased to pour down by then? and the sun will be out warm enough to do a bit of promenading along the sea front. We hope no one got flooded, shipmates and friends were phoning us to see if we were ok, I think it was because we live close to the Thames, the nearest we get to a flooding, which happens whenever it rains, is when the one and only drain in our cul de sac is blocked, so far we have seen the gully cleaner once in the forty years we have lived here, our road sweeper was made redundant years ago. Our road is rather small and gets bypassed by the motorised sweeper. Complaining gets nothing done, I've even sent photos of the flooded road to the Oxford council, but they don't do anything. We just get the usual excuse, 'We are short of money'. There are just two months and a few days left before we have the reunion. If you have not booked in yet please **do so as soon as possible, the cut-off date is the April 23rd**. After that date the hotel will start letting the rooms we have not reserved. I did not hear of Weston S M being flooded, hopefully we will have good weather. Don't forget to book a seat on the coach, there are things to do in Bristol, loads of shops, visit the docks, and don't forget the SS Great Britain? I have been aboard her, she is magnificent, well worth a visit. I will try and find out the boarding fee, perhaps we can arrange for the coach to drop off there as well. I checked the prices, probably not much different to other attractions. Adult £13.75 Senior Cits £12.50, group bookings of 20 or more is also available, we would have to phone for a price, can't really do that until we know how many want to make the visit. I will get Sharon (Social Secretary), to make further enquiries.

S/m Joe Sutton phoned yesterday, our last message from him was he could not attend the reunion, his Doc has said it was not wise to travel, poor old Joe has had a lot of health problems over the last few months, has been into hospital twice. He tells me he now has only about 20% of his heart working? at the moment. I have 50% working, he also had fluid on the lung. If it was anything like when I had it; I know how he felt. However Joe has got the all clear to travel to the reunion providing he is accompanied, so his grandson will be with him, we are booking them into a twin room, possibly on the ground floor. *Sorry to say Associate member Colin Taylor who comes to our reunions has suffered a stroke and will not be attending this year. We hope that all medical treatment Colin receives will be very successful.*

You may find a reminder attached. It maybe a Subscription reminder or a Hotel/Reunion reminder, it may even be both. It is essential that we receive the rest of your hotel/reunion payment by April 21st. The outstanding amount will be stated on the note. Make cheques for reunion only payable to HMS Phoebe Association (Welfare)

The cover photo is Shipmate Jim and Pat Mayer. Jim and Pat have been ill for some time and both were in a care home. Their neighbours rallied round and looked after their property, they visited the care home and made sure Jim and Pat had all they needed, one of them Jim made his Power of Attorney, their well being was thoroughly in hand. But Pats health went down and sadly she passed away on Feb 5th. Jim, who, among other health problems was also suffering with dementia and began to worsen, sadly Jim passed away on Feb 20th. Their next door neighbour, and another neighbour were executors of their wills, and they arranged the funeral etc. Unfortunately we have been unable to attend. We are making a donation from the Association to the care home that looked after Jim & Pat so well, our donation will go towards buying a Mini - Bus for their patients.

It is with much regret that I must inform you of the passing of Shipmate Albert (Rattler) Morgan, Boy Seaman. Albert had been ill for a number of years and for some years been in a care home. He contracted Alzheimers and took a turn for the worse in June last year, his health deteriorated over the next seven months and sadly he passed away on the 24th January. We did not know this until after the February newsletter had been sent out, by then Albert had been cremated. Albert was one of our founder members. Farewell My Friend & Messmate.

Reunion Info. I said we may be able to get a group booking to visit the SS Gt Britain. *For a group of 20 or more persons, each ticket would cost £8. (Full price is £12.95).* **We need to know before we can make a group booking how many of you want to visit the ship?** There are food outlets cafes and restraunts in the dock area. Plus other attractions. The coach has been organised to stop at the ship to drop off passengers and to pick them up there later around 4.30 pm. I will check on how to get from the ship to town centre. (Job now done). *Bus number is 506, to Broadmead, city centre, leaves from the SS Gt Britain car park at half hour intervals.* Please let us know your needs 01235 211501 - **ASAP**, our answer phone will be on if we are not available. There are still six seats vacant, anyone wishing to book a seat please phone us. **(Don't forget to bring your bus pass, if you have one?)** There is free on street parking at the hotel which is situated in a one way street, as it is a Friday, which is normally a change over day for hotels etc, there maybe a few parking spaces outside the hotel. The street has a high wall all the way down the right hand side, you cannot park on that side of the street, but you can park free along the road on the other side of the wall, there is a council car park nearby, but its £3 for 24 hrs. Suggestion? If no parking spaces in the hotel street? Unload luggage before looking for a parking space .

Obituary Patrick Wilson Forbes. Association Life member No 23

26. February 1920 – 21. February 2014

Pat was borne and brought up in Aberdeen. On leaving school he worked for a clothing house in the Granite City before moving to similar employment in London in 1938. It was there, living in a Young Mens Hostel that, following commencement of hostilities, he received his invitation to join the Royal Navy. He joined up at HMS Ganges and underwent his basic training and was allocated to the Radar Plot specialism. Joining HMS Phoebe in early 1941. Pat served in Phoebe for three years and endured the Mediterranean, North Africa and Greek campaigns including both Torpedoings and passages to Brooklyn for repair. Having advanced to PO (Radar) he left Phoebe at Malta to return home to undertake CW selection in which he was unsuccessful. A few courses followed before joining the brand new Cruiser HMS Swiftsure. After Swiftsure he was drafted to HMS Liverpool which re-commissioned at Rosyth after a period in reserve. His last draft was as an Instructor at HMS Nightjar RNAS Inskip. Demobbed in May 1946, Pat married Florence Ayres in 1947, they had met when she was in the WRNS. His general health went into decline over the last year and he 'Crossed the Bar' peacefully just one week short of his 94th birthday. Pat had very few relatives but his funeral was extremely well attended by friends and Village neighbours. The Halstock and district RBL Standard was paraded. He is survived by his only son Alastair Pat was one of Life's Gentlemen and will be sorely missed.

In World War II, a quarter of a million Allied soldiers and airmen were stranded behind enemy lines and became prisoners of war. Just a few thousand - somewhere between 3,000 and 5,000 - evaded capture, stayed free and made a 'home run', usually by travelling across occupied France, over the Pyrenees and into neutral Spain. Their courage was constantly tested as they fought the most intimate of wars in the enemy's own backyard. They walked hundreds of miles, swam raging rivers in the dark, climbed mountains, sneaked past German barracks and frontier posts, talked their way through checkpoints and snap inspections, or, more often, posed as deaf mutes and said nothing. Others chanced their luck on the railways where Gestapo agents and collaborationist local policemen roamed the corridors on the lookout for runaways. Those who got through needed coolness, courage, determination - and, above all, luck. They had to trust their helpers totally, yet fear every stranger and suspect every would-be friend, they were unsung heroes. But their deeds cut no ice with the military authorities in London, who allocated just two men in a small office in Whitehall to organise helping them.

There were few medals for those who beat such enormous odds. The Gestapo, SS and Luftwaffe became obsessed with hunting them down and diverted precious resources to finding and destroying their escape lines. When a long-lost man completed his home run and returned to his squadron, apart from boasting numbers he was living proof to every one of his comrades that this war was survivable. Not one of the men who made it back to Britain would have stood a chance without the aid of brave souls who defied the Germans. But sometimes men on the run had doors slammed in their faces by people too frightened to help - but equally they benefited from countless spontaneous gestures of support, whether a simple bowl of soup, a change of clothing or a bed for the night. Other helpers went further, taking men in at great risk to themselves and hiding them for months on end. Some of the bravest of all were little more than girls. Seventeen-year-old Nadine Dumon, a quiet, studious Belgian, was driven by indignation at the Germans for invading her country and taking away her freedom. She began secretly distributing a clandestine newspaper called Libre Belgique and acting as a courier for her father, who was in the Resistance. Then she advanced from a bearer of messages to a transporter of people. Sixty years later, she recalled how a local headmaster named Frederic de Jongh came to see her. "He said his daughter, Andree, was organising the escape of British servicemen and needed help.

"My first job was to pick up a soldier who was hiding in our area and guide him to another safe place. I took him on a tram through Brussels and dropped him off. It was as simple as that. I wasn't scared, but I did know that if I was caught I would be tortured and shot." Nadine had just joined what was to be one of the most successful escape lines of World War II - dubbed the Comet Line because of the speed with which it got men home.

Home. Its founding genius was Andree, known to everyone as Dedee. she was in her mid-20s but looked younger, just another girl in ankle socks, pretty enough in her light blue floral dress and dark jumper but with nothing to make her stand out in a crowd. Her ordinariness was her disguise. It hid the steeliness and courage to carry out extraordinary deeds. In 1941, she took a group of escaping Belgian soldiers across the Pyrenees and presented herself at the British consulate in Bilbao. She explained that her family had been helping British evaders since Dunkirk and that she had put in place a chain of safe houses all the way from Belgium. She said she was prepared to pass more servicemen along it, so long as an organisation was set up to collect them once they crossed the mountains. Although Spain was neutral, its government sympathised with the Nazis - and previous evaders had been arrested and thrown into concentration camps.

Dedee was greeted with scepticism. Surely she was far too fragile to have made the mountain crossing? A quick check established that she had. But was she a German plant, an infiltrator? London was drawn into the discussions. The acting head of MI6 dismissed her as a phoney but cooler heads ordered checks, and she came up clean. With the new code name of 'Postman', she was told to concentrate on British airmen, now being shot down in increasing numbers as the bombing against Germany intensified. Dedee set off on her journey, only to learn that Brussels was too dangerous for her, the Gestapo had raided her home. She decided to operate from France, sending her father a suitably innocent message - - Envoyez-moi des enfants (Send me some children). It was at this point that Nadine Dumon was recruited, escorting evaders on the start of their journey before handing them over to Dedee. And so it was that airmen on a Wellington bomber, found themselves living through scenes that could have come from a farfetched adventure film. The plane was downed on its way back from a raid on Aachen, when flak blew the starboard engine. Astonishingly, the pilot managed to land the plane on a darkened Nazi airfield outside Antwerp, skidding to a halt beside rows of parked Dorniers and Messerschmitts. They expected to find themselves surrounded by armed Germans. But no? The place was deserted. Only when they exploded flares inside the Wellington did they hear distant shouts and the revving of engines. Splitting up, they ran pell-mell for the perimeter fence. Jack Newton and two comrades were spotted by a passing cyclist. "Ello? Are you English airmen?" he called out. "I am with the Resistance." The rest of the group were caught and became POWs. The three airmen were whisked away to a farmhouse, and put under fierce interrogation. Reasonably enough, the Resistance didn't believe their story. How had a British bomber managed to land on a Luftwaffe airfield and its crew escape? It sounded preposterous. They had to be imposters. It was not long since the Germans had pulled a crashed Wellington bomber out of the river Meuse, stripped the uniforms from the drowned crew, dressed six of their own English speakers in them and sent them to infiltrate the escape line. The Resistance had soon cottoned on and dealt with them. But were the Nazis trying the same trick again? A furious debate ensued. Some wanted to kill Newton and his friends immediately. Newton was subjected to furious cross-examination about his life in London. Just one wrong answer would mean a bullet in the head, but it all checked out when passed to London by radio. Newton found himself separated from his crewmates and moved from house to house so often he lost count, locked alone in attics and cellars. Once, finding himself unwatched in a suburban home, he rebelled. Deciding to risk a quick walk outside, he slipped through the garden gate straight into the path of a

German soldier? and his papers were demanded. As if in a dream (or so he recalled), he walked towards the German with only one option. He hit the soldier hard in the face and the man crumpled, unconscious. Newton was smuggled away instantly to another refuge, lodged with a monk the size of Friar Tuck who packed two Colt revolvers under his cassock. He explained that one gun was for any German who came his way - and the other was for Newton if he compromised the escape line again. It was no idle threat. When bored evaders in Paris slipped out of their hiding places to have fun in cafes and clubs, Resistance chiefs sent a call for guidance to MI6 in London, and received a two-word reply: "Kill them." But luckily the evaders had been passed on. Newton found himself in gentler hands. Before long, he was sitting a few seats away from Dedee on an express train heading south. As it pulled into Bayonne, on the Atlantic coast, Dedee stood up, straightened her hat in the mirror and glanced round casually, checking that Newton and her other two charges had got the message. Newton stood up too, pushing his copy of Le Figaro into his overcoat pocket. He had been buried in its pages for hours, not understanding a word, just keeping his head down, anything to discourage other passengers from striking up a conversation. Suddenly, a German soldier banged against him, pushing his way to the door. Newton let him go. These were dangerous moments when an English "sorry" or an "excuse me" could slip out and blow a man's cover. Newton and his two companions - an Australian and a Pole - were the first travellers on the fully-fledged Comet Line. They were 'Package One', 'Package Two' and Package Three' - the first of the 110 deliveries Dedee would make. Newton kept the Belgian girl in sight as she headed away from the ticket barrier, towards the station cafe. There, another girl was waiting, they followed her to a door which she unlocked and they found them selves on the street, so simple? Dedee took them onto a tram, when they got off, they saw in the distance the Pyreneese. Newton looked at them and smiled. He felt daunted at the sight of the mountains but knew he it was the last barrier to Spain and freedom, with this in mind he briskly set off after Dedee as she strode off, keeping a few yards in front of them. All three made it home.

Last year S/m Ian Gough was taken ill at Gt Yarmouth and had to cut short the reunion on the Sunday. He and Janet got home safely, but Ian's health is still not good. We phoned him to see if he would be attending this years reunion, but sadly he has had to call it off, he does not think he will be well enough. We send him and Janet our best regards and hope that his health will get better. Perhaps we will see them next year.

1960 My last deployment: *I had returned to RNB Chatham after a nice relaxing tow job, Malta to Singapore which took a few weeks. Surprisingly we were sent straight off on one weeks leave I was due for de-mob in August 61. On my return to RNB I was sent to see the drafting officer who I had once served with I never did get on with him, but this time he smiled and asked if I had enjoyed my trip to Singapore, he laughed then said 'Well here's another one for you which will see out your time' he stamped and signed my draft chit and gave it to me, a quick scan showed I was now on the Captain of Chatham Dockyards staff, or the Harbour Masters boats crew. It was afternoon when I eventually arrived at the house, the Cox'n let me in and showed me the Seaman's bed room to stow my kit in. Stationed in the Captains house, with cosy basement quarters, our own kitchen, & 4 twin bedrooms plus a big lounge. The staff was a PO Cox'n & a PO Shipwright, 1 Officers Cook, 1 Stoker, and 2 A/Bs. Going into the lounge where the rest of the crew were lazing on arm chairs and a settee, I was introduced to everyone, then the Cox'n told me my duties, 8am to 9am, clean up the Captains study, then up to the third floor and clean the Daughters bedroom if she had been home, and the same for Grannies room, clean the bathroom, hall and stairs. Have it all done by 1200 ready to be inspected if the captains wife wants to, (never did while I was there). Afternoon we were on standby or cleaning the Captains car, mostly we sat watching TV or reading. At 1500 it was time to get changed to go ashore. Only one person had to stay the night at the house, the Stoker was from Glasgow, he had volunteered to do Mon to Fri each week, but no weekends, the rest of us each did a duty long weekend 1 in 5. Only once did we man the launch while I was there, we sailed up to Tower Bridge for an Italian warships visit. Once, when I was duty weekend, I had the whole house to myself, waking Saturday morning to a really horrible smell, it took me over an hour to suss it out, in the Captains kitchen, it was really bad, I checked cupboards & ovens etc every nook and cranny I could not find anything that smelt. I noticed the small top window was open, the back door opened onto a very narrow yard with railings facing the house, hanging from the railing head down was a Hare, its belly slit and held open with a skewer its inside was covered in maggots, the smell was disgusting. I got a broom, and using the handle part I lifted the body off the railing and got it into the gash bin, quickly putting the lid on to stop the smell. Good job bins were emptied on Saturdays. I was going to tell the cook about the hare on Monday, but he did not come in until mid morning. At Lunch time he came in complaining about not being able to prepare a special dinner for that night for the Captains guests, someone had nicked his delicacy. I kept dead quiet, and learnt that a hare had to be rotten to make it taste good. Don't know what they had instead, maybe the Admiral made do with beans on toast?? The Captain called me into his study. I was being drafted to Pompey for de-mob, he asked if I would like the use of his launch for a trip up the Medway with staff and their Ladies/ When I said I would, he said there would be a few of cases of beer for us to celebrate. It did happen, but rain lashed down so hard we could not see to steer so we anchored the boat in Rochester Reaches and had a good booze up instead. I had enjoyed my short time there, house cleaning was definitely a change, the Captains name was Suther. Mrs Suther was almost motherly to us all. But I was not sorry to leave.....Roy.*