

HMS Phoebe
Association

Newsletter

February 2010



Sid & Moreen Hall

Here we are again, another year has flown by, it had its ups and downs, more downs than ups I'm afraid. For me things went off quite well to start with; if you can include a heart attack in January, which led to my having a 'stent' inserted in my heart, I do feel a lot better for it, I don't get angina quite so much now.

The next thing on the agenda was the reunion, a hiccup with car parking but it was another great reunion. The hotel was just right, staff perfect, the trip to the RN Club a pleasure, I did the whole thing again in October with the Sheffield association. I was relieved when shipmates asked if we could visit again sometime. You never know so it will be kept in mind?

At the end of July I had a major upset! I had finished the August newsletter and had it ready to post, as usual at this time I sat at the computer to transfer the newsletter to our web site, all went well until the time came to press the enter button, and I was informed that the procedure was not able to carry out the process, I tried a few more times with the same result before I found out that I had run out of web space, that is the amount of space I was allowed by my internet supplier. (NTL). So I was at a loss. All I could think of was no more web site. This carried on until November when I decided that we would have to give up NTL and go private, although we belonged to a hosting company their charges for taking on the web site completely were high, so I searched the internet and came up with www.one.com, The web space allowance was 3000 mb, 2950 mb more than NTL, more than we would ever need and the cost was even less than we were paying our other hosting company for just having the domain name, ie www.hmsphoebe.co.uk. Now I had the daunting task of transferring the web site, it was not easy, a bit mind blowing, but it got done, the only thing that went wrong was the company I was transferring out of closed down our account before they had transferred all of our files, which meant I have had to rebuild the web site from scratch. If you are able to look at the site, it is still under the same domain address but completely different in style. I have yet to find out how to include newsletters in it, so be patient please.

We lost a shipmate last year, although I did not know this until a couple of weeks ago, when we think it was his wife who phoned.

Royal Marine Sgt **Bernard Balding** 'crossed the bar' during April
Another shipmate has left the association due to ill health.

Shipmate Simon Fisher developed dementia and could no longer relate. We send our good wishes to Simon and hope his wife is coping ok.

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 My worst nightmare is having to report the death of a dear friend and Shipmate. PO Shipwright Sydney Hall sadly crossed the bar suddenly while in hospital on December 9th. I was a boy seaman when I first met Sid, I got to know him well during my QD duties running messages down to his shop etc. He was a nice fellow to know and always treated me as an equal, never as a underling. Lil and I have visited with Sid and Moreen on our way to the Scarborough reunions and on the way to my Grandsons, the welcome we got each time was not unlike a family reunion.

It seems like only yesterday that we were visiting them in Tadcaster. The funeral was arranged for the 18th December at the Bishopsthorpe Crematorium, Nr York, Lil and I went up as far as Selby and stayed there for the night, then proceeded the next morning to the crematorium in the snow.

Just before 1.30 pm we met up with the members of the Wetherby Branch of the RNA, together with their standard. When the funeral courtage arrived we formed a guard of honour, then followed into the chapel.

There was sixteen in the guard, to give a good send off to Sid.

Unfortunately with the deterioration in the weather we could not go to the club after the funeral and had to say our good byes to Moreen and family, and make the long drive home, which we completed in less than four hours, luckily meeting no snow or ice but plenty of muddy wheel spray.

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 From Derek West.

During the last week of November a phone call from the Ramsgate RNA standard bearer asking could I bring the HMS Phoebe standard to the funeral of Sgt Robert Dickson, the Military Policeman who had been shot in Afghanistan, the funeral was to be held in Deal, Kent, on December 9th. The Deal RM Association were organising the venue and had asked for local standards and veterans to parade in Deal at 1100 prompt.

I had sent our standard to S/m Bob Hobbs earlier ready for him to parade it on Remembrance Day at Bournemouth. After that event Roy had taken the standard back home to Didcot. I rang Roy and within two days the standard was back with me at my home in Minster, Kent.

Myself and two more standard bearers from Ramsgate arrived nice and early at 1000am, but the place was already crowded with Military Police, standard bearers and Vets from the services, a very good turn-out indeed. Twenty standards lined the road outside the church, all dipping as the courtage passed, it was not raining! but it was rather wet underfoot. The church was packed and no room for the standard bearers to stand, but there was a pub right opposite the church, some bearers took refuge and a beverage or two while the service was going on. When the service ended we paraded outside the church again to dip the standards as the courtage wended its way in to the grave yard. Refreshments had been set up in the RMA social club in Deal which was most welcome, there was still plenty left when we said our farewells, and left to go home in the rain. S/m D West. *“Thank you Derek for all the work you put into parading the standard so often”.* Roy.

The following article headed: “CYCLONE” is written by S/m A Hoyle.

Boxing Day always reminds me of 65 years ago, 26th December 1944 on board HMS Phoebe in Trincomalee, Ceylon, known now as Sri Lanka, preparing for sea. We were about to depart with two other cruisers, the Newcastle and Nigeria in company with the destroyers Pathfinder, Raider and Rapid. Our destination Akyab on the Arakan coast of Burma. To cover and assist in landing troops who were to dislodge the Japs and carry on down through Burma.

I am not too sure of the actual date of departure, but it must have been around the New Year as we were due to attack on the 3rd Jan. 1945. We weighed anchor after making the best we could of Christmas; such as coming on deck and finding someone had decorated the masthead with a small Christmas tree, and the cooks giving us on Christmas day proper Christmas food. All five ships sailed off in company. Not long after sailing we received a W/T signal that we would be encountering a cyclone, moving as they often do across the Bay of Bengal in the direction of Bangladesh, and would cross our intended course. Orders were received for the destroyers to divert to a new course to try and reduce their exposure to the full force of the storm, the cruisers were to continue on their present course.

A cyclone is a whirlwind travelling across the surface of the planet, initially and mainly over the sea and eventually over the land.

As we progressed the wind gradually increased and the sea became much rougher. I would describe the experience as eerie in some respects. The normal daylight changed to a very dismal, almost a dark sandy hue. It was one of those occasions when the wind seemed to certainly have more effect than the waves, although the waves were big enough.

My position on watch was on the the bridge, on the starboard side of the compass platform with a couple of officers, one standing behind the compass binnacle in the centre of the bridge and the other on the port wing. The bridge was open to the elements, with no overhead shelter, but there were toughened glass windows around the bridge that could be raised up to head level, some had a spinning clear view centre allowing one to see through when the sea came over the bridge, or during rain, but the wind deflectors took the airflow overhead resulting in bridge staff getting their back and legs soaked. It was as we entered these fierce winds, fine on our starboard bow when we began to pitch and toss in a slightly corkscrew fashion that I realised how the steel structure of a ship could be flexible, this was while, as always, looking in every direction as good watch-keepers do that I happened to notice the wireless aerials stretched between the two masts were alternately dipping in the middle then tightening, which to me indicated the two masts were actually tilting towards each other and back again to normal as the ship pitched and tossed. In my mind it meant the deck was actually bending, for several reasons I kept this reckoning to myself because it was not the ideal time to get into a argument, or to be considered nutty!

As we sailed on the wind with unbelievable force came beam on across the three ships, now the shape of thing took on a new perspective. In my opinion, believe it or not, that under this pressure the ships were heeling over to leeward in excess of 45 degrees. I came to this conclusion when I looked across the bridge to the officer of the watch standing in the port wing who should have been on eye level with me, but found that I was looking down on him, he seemed to be skimming just above the water, much the same I imagined like it would be on a yacht under full sail. I began to wonder if the ship was about to capsize, not a happy thought! There were intervals in the gusts and the ship would come upright and beyond with a rush requiring a firm a firm grip on something solid to maintain a normal posture, this procedure carried on constantly and became gradually became an acceptable motion, the initial fear of imminent disaster being slightly dispelled, there was nothing we could do about it anyway.

Our tonnage was about 5500, the other ships were in the region of 8000 tons each. How were they fairing? They were ahead and slightly to port of us. It was an amazing sight to see they were getting the same treatment we were, although bigger and heavier than us, it made no difference to the natural forces at work.

All of our warships were camouflaged with various patterns and colours above water level, what is normally not visible is the black paint below. What we were surprised to see when the ships received the full force of the gusts was the red paint on the very flat bottom painted either side of the keel, This showed how far they were heeling over from the upright. I cannot remember if we sailed through the eye of the storm where the wind would have been from a different direction, maybe I had come off watch by then. But what I do remember is that down in the mess it was a mess. It must have been dinner-time because tots of rum were available, these being issued during the forenoon watch, and as usual, ours being kept for us in a safe place. Having been the roughest trip since joining the ship some were sea-sick, I just felt a bit queezy, but had no intention of foregoing my tot which seemed to settle me somewhat. The mess deck was a complete shambles, anything not securely fixed down was spread all over, the drawers of cutlery and utensils had come out, and as the storm was still raging, the mess table could not be used as normal, plates had to be held still by one hand, utensils in the other, and walking about was hardly possible. Eventually we came out of the storm and began tidying the mess-deck, putting things back where they belonged then scrubbing the deck, gradually returning to normality.

The night before we reached our destination as usual we prepared for Action Stations, this meant a shower and clean white underwear. A well scrubbed boiler-suit, Anti-Flash gear, lifebelt and steel helmet close to hand, then to to kip down, my bed was the wooden form along side the mess table, only to be rudely woken by sound of action stations over the Tannoy system. Arriving at Akyab at the appointed time. We had prepared for a bombardment as troops landed but we were not wanted for that purpose due to the enemy troops having moved out except for a few stragglers. The other two cruisers left the area but Phoebe remained for a short time in the harbour surviving with others a bomb and strafing attack from four Japanese fighter bombers making a sneak attack on our position.

We sailed again to make a flying visit to Chittagong to embark Indian soldiers and transport them to a point on the coast south of Akyab. This basically was the start of our operations supporting the Army at various times down the Burmese coast and finally to Rangoon.

Written in 2004, now Christmas 2009

MORE SHORT STORIES REQUIRED FOR NEWSLETTERS

Please let us have your reservations for the May reunion at Llandudno. We know it is a long way to go but the end result is the good time you'll have with all the lamp swinging etc.

So come on get those reservations made now.

Lil and I have just made our usual weeks holiday booking in the Isle of Thanet, the same site as last year (Got a discount for booking early).

We will be starting it Saturday 3rd July. Looking forward to meeting up with the Kent contingent again. Roy.

Reunion:

Sorry to say that due to cost of hire and numbers reserving seats we are unable to run a coach trip this time, please make a note on your reservation copy by crossing off the coach trip. But I have been in touch with the Great Orme Funicular Tramway Company regarding discounted return trips to the top of Gt Orme, there are wonderful views from the top and I believe a place for snacks. Traveling on this tram is a great experience, there are not many of its type left running in the UK now. I have proposed to the company we have a number of tickets on a sale or return basis to cover both Saturday and Sunday for which we will pay for from the funds, but we may ask shipmates to help out a little by donating a pound or two towards the cost, exactly how much depends on the quote from the tram company.

We have had a good response to hotel bookings, but we could certainly do with more, although we made a cut-off date for the 7th April it is not imperative that we keep to it, just remember that when we are asked by the hotel to send them all the reservations and payments we have; the hotel will probably take over any later reservations.

The hotel is quite large and rooms will most probably be available until the reunion weekend. Car parking at the rear for about 20 vehicles.

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The 1st HMS Phoebe was a 36-gun **Fifth Rate** 18-pounder **frigate** of the **British Royal Navy**. As completed, she measured 142ft 9in on the gundeck (119ft 0in keel) x 38ft 3in breadth x 13ft 5 1/2in depth in hold, with a tonnage of 926 8/94 burthen. She mounted 26 x 18-pounder guns on the upper deck, 8 x 9-pounder guns and 6 x 32-pounder carronades on the quarterdeck, and 2 x 9-pounder guns and 4 x 32-pounder carronades on the fore-castle, with a complement of 264 men.

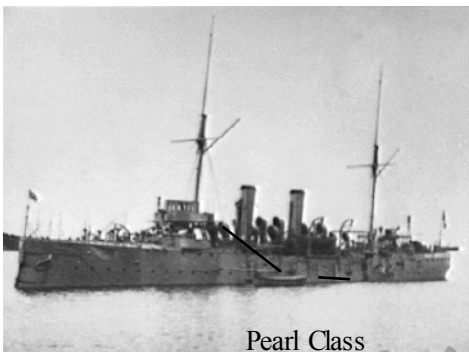
The 2nd HMS Phoebe was a 51 gun Fourth Rate ship. During the first half of the 18th century, a **ship of the line** mounting from 46 up to 60 guns. While the number of guns stayed subsequently in the same range up until 1817, after 1756 the ships of 50 guns and below were considered too weak to stand in the line of battle. However, the 50-gun ship continued to be used largely during the **Seven Years' War**, and during the time of the **American Revolution** a whole new group of 50-gun ships was constructed, not for the battlefleet, but to meet the needs of combat in the shallow waters off North America

The 3rd HMS Phoebe was a **Pearl class cruiser** a class of nine third class **cruisers** designed by **Sir William White**, five of which were paid for by **Australia** under the terms of the Imperial Defence Act of 1887 to serve in Australian waters.

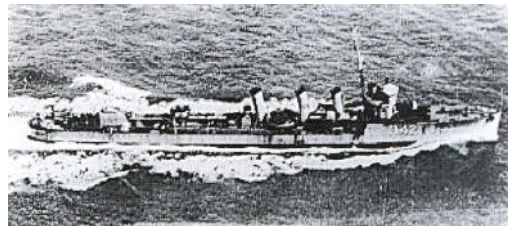
The 4th HMS Phoebe was a **M class destroyer**, more properly known as the **Admiralty M class**, were a **class** of 85 **destroyers** built for the **Royal Navy** that saw service during **World War I**. All ships were built to an identical - Admiralty - design, hence the class name (25 other vessels of the 'M' class were built to variant designs by three specialist

The 5th HMS Phoebe was a Dido Class **light cruiser**. The term is a shortening of the phrase "light **armoured cruiser**", describing a small ship that carried armour in the same way as an armoured cruiser: a protective belt and deck. Prior to this smaller cruisers had been of the **protected cruiser** model, possessing armoured decks only.

The 6th HMS Phoebe was a **Leander class Type 42**, comprising twenty-six **frigates**, was among the most numerous and long-lived classes of frigate in the **Royal Navy's** modern history. The class was built in three batches between 1959 and 1973. It had an unusually high public profile, due to the popular and acclaimed **Warship BBC** television drama series "HMS HERO"



Pearl Class
cruiser



M Class
Destroyer

HMS "BARHAM", THE ONLY BRITISH BATTLESHIP SUNK AT SEA BY A GERMAN SUBMARINE

Following training at HMS "Ganges", and "St George", (stone frigates), in August 1941 I joined my first ship, HMS "Barham" as a Boy Seaman Class II (the lowest form of animal life). The ship's company comprised of approximately 1275 officers and ratings. During the first three months aboard this vessel, I gleaned the whereabouts of my mess (where we dined and slung our hammocks), where I worked daily from 06.30 hours, the locations of my action and defence stations, the canteen and the 'Heads' (ship's lavatories).

In late November 1941, the Eastern Mediterranean Fleet, comprising the battleships HMS "Queen Elizabeth", HMS "Barham" and HMS "Valiant", accompanied by cruisers and destroyers (two of the latter being "Hotspur" and "Nizam") set sail from the Egyptian port of Alexandria to support the army in its North African desert push westwards.

During the afternoon of Tuesday 25th November, an enemy aircraft began to shadow the Fleet, obviously to keep the enemy submarines, aircraft etc informed of the Fleet's position. The enemy aircraft remained out of range of the Fleet's anti-aircraft guns. Unfortunately, the RAF was not in the position to provide adequate cover. The only 'air' support being our inflated life belts. The three battleships proceeded in line astern of the flagship "Queen Elizabeth" with the CinC Eastern Mediterranean, Admiral Cunningham aboard.

At approximately 16.25 hours, a German submarine managed to penetrate the destroyer screen surrounding the three capital ships without detection, and fired a spray of torpedoes. Unfortunately for the ship's company of the "Barham" all 3 torpedoes found their mark! Within seconds the vessel listed to port, and two minutes later the "Barham" was blown to smithereens, killing nearly 900 officers and men. All that was left of the vessel was a huge cloud of black smoke, and a large patch of oily seawater.

The enemy submarine had been very close, and the underwater explosions forced it to the surface, close to the "Valiant". The latter was unable to depress it's guns low enough to obtain hits. The submarine dived and escaped.

I was at my defence stations, which was the 'Transmitting Station' which, when given necessary details, could provide information to the gunlayers to enable the guns to be elevated and traversed before firing. The TS was located several decks below the waterline. To obtain entry one had to open and close several watertight doors below decks, with the last access through a porthole built into the last door, which had to be kept closed at all times with watertight clips after the last occupant of the TS had passed through. The number of personnel manning the TS was 6 to 8. At 16.15 the crew of the TS was relieved for tea, (a mug of tea and a sticky bun partaken on the mess deck). At 16.25 I was just finishing my tea hours when the torpedoes struck. The ship immediately began to list to port.

No one seemed to know what had happened! Was it bombs or torpedoes? All of us on the mess deck immediately made for the gangway leading to the upper deck. I was clad in blue overalls, underpants, socks and boots, and a lifebelt already inflated. I arrived on the upper deck and found it difficult to negotiate the sloping deck. Taking off my boots and putting on my lifebelt, I and many others looked towards the bridge, now in chaos, listening for the order to 'abandon' ship. It was obvious that order would be forthcoming. I decided to start sliding down the side of the ship, and as I neared the bilges there was a gigantic explosion which blew me off the ship's side and into the sea.

My next recollection was of being dragged under, and wondering when I was going to stop going down! Eventually I surfaced, but only to take a deep breath before being sucked down again. It was disconcerting, and I started to swallow seawater and oil. Surfacing for the second time I took another deep breath, and again was pulled under (obviously the undertow caused by the sinking ship). As I was sucked under for the third time, I recalled the saying that three times was the end! However, I proved this saying wrong, and bobbed up like a cork (cheers for the lifebelt) but was unable to see anything because of the oil on the surface. There were no signs of the rest of the Fleet, presumably proceeding out of the area in case of further submarine, and possibly air attacks. Lots of debris was floating on the surface, and heads could be seen bobbing about. There were awful cries of the wounded, and gradually small groups of men clustered together, using the debris for support.

Eventually two destroyers returned, "Hotspur" and "Nizam" a New Zealand vessel, both began the task of picking up survivors. Because the "Hotspur" was quite close, I made for it and scrambled aboard using the scrambling nets. I had been in the water for about two hours, then I learned that the Mediterranean has its quota of man-eating sharks. Perhaps the explosions and the oil had kept them away?. There were many of the "Hotspur's" ship's company who earned medals that day, although their efforts were not recognised! Some members of their crew dived over the side with lines attached, and brought in the straggling survivors who were either wounded or exhausted. One particular person I saw being helped aboard, I recognised was Admiral Priddam-Whipple. He had survived the sinking. A 3-badge able seaman leaned over the scrambling net and said, "come on you doddering old b....d, come aboard". The Admiral never uttered a word apart from "thanks". Some survivors had to remain on the upper deck. A few did not survive their wounds. Jugs of rum were passed round which had a similar effect to morphine. At that time I had not begun to imbibe. Although I have made up for it since!

I took stock of my position. Someone on the "Hotspur" had given me an old naval watch-coat (a long overcoat) to wear, though it had not buttons. I noticed that my underpants were no longer with me; the back end of my overalls was non-existent at the rear and I had lost my socks. Reaction set in, and I began to feel pain. I had scraped my hands, feet, bottom and part of my back on the barnacles as I slid down the side of the ship, but I counted myself lucky to be alive. Later we were provided with hot soup and tea, and I had periods of slipping in and out of sleep. One or two days later, the Admiral addressed those of us who were not disabled, and said that on arrival at our destination, Alexandria, and in our letters home, we were neither to discuss nor to relate our experiences, essentially for security and morale reasons. Our parents and next of kin were informed of our survival of the sinking in 'February 1942'. However, on arrival at Alexandria, it was clear that the local population, particularly the dockworkers, were well aware that some major catastrophe had befallen the Fleet, because the tops of buildings and sheds were thick with spectators. They had spotted the survivors on the upper deck, and merely two battleships had returned. Soon the news would be all over Alexandria and the Middle East.

On disembarking, we mounted the gangway of the "Resource", a submarine depot ship. As we passed along the gangway, we were given a packet of Woodbines, a large bar of "Pusser's Hard" (an eight inch long bar of yellow soap about two inches square) and were invited to go below for a shower, to get rid of the oil on our bodies. Some time elapsed before all traces of oil disappeared from all orifices!

Each survivor was issued with a skeleton kit, and then we were sent to the outskirts of Alexandria, into the desert, where we were housed in tents. We lazed around for a couple of days, and then informed that survivors would be going home but not the boys or the ordinary seamen! It was considered they would lose too much valuable training time.!? In Alexandria, Italian miniature submarines had penetrated the submarine screen by following surface shipping underwater, into the harbour. Undetected, the crews of the mini-sub had attached limpet mines to the hulls of the battleships "Queen Elizabeth" and "Valiant". When these exploded the vessels did not sink completely, because the harbour was so shallow, they were left sitting on the harbour bottom. In less than two months the enemy had written off 3 battleships, and left the Eastern Mediterranean Fleet much depleted. The "Queen Elizabeth" and "Valiant" were given temporary repairs in dry dock, and were eventually dispatched to the U.S.A. for complete repairs. Thus the Fleet was left with just a handful of cruisers, destroyers, mine layers, frigates and submarines.

On New Year's Eve 1941 I was drafted to the cruiser "Euryalus", which had just arrived from Chatham.

Frustrated/Apologetic
(Marjorie and Vic Chanter)

It's been a most emotional Christmas.

On the 5th of November Marjorie was admitted to hospital, and remained there for the next 18 days. She had developed a chest infection, which exacerbated an existing lung complaint. As she improved, and in order for her to be allowed home, the house had to be adapted to user-friendly: stair lift or single floor access only.

The family pulled out all the stops to move furniture, which included outing the bookcase to make room for the re-siting of 'my office', so that a single bed could be installed. Everyone pitched in and Marjorie arrived home to the familiar four walls and the loving family. Since when she has vastly improved.

For a week or so, I was too busy to think about reconnecting the computer. The 'helpers' had disconnected everything, and had thoughtfully redirected my modem connection.

But, Christmas was looming. At that point, Marjorie and I began the card writing, having previously armed ourselves with ample ammunition.

Immediate family addresses were easy, but for post codes we had to refer to the address book. No problem there. But ...

Where had someone stowed my HMS Phoebe and RNCA membership books? The helpful answer I got was: "There in the house somewhere."

The feeling of frustration increased with each card I received from shipmates. Marjorie and I came up with pearls of wisdom like: 'that's from our friends at Harrow', and 'that's George and Josie' and on and on. But where were the addresses, which were always kept close at hand and kept up-to-date? Too late to get a copy from Roy.

One thing I can say for sure is that, because of our frustration, you have all been in our thoughts much more this year than just the signing of a card.

We hope you had a great time and will have a successful, happy and prosperous New Year.

Its not very often we hear from Lillian and Taffy Beckerton, but we had a card from them and a note from Taffy, the following is the note:

Dear Roy & Member's,

As you can see Lillian is still keeping her hand in. We are members of the Royal Services League, (RSL).

Hope you all had a Merry Christmas, (and I do mean MERRY!).

Best wishes to you all,

Lillian and Taff.

Thanks

To the people of Somers,

I would like to thank you for the support you gave to this year's Remembrance Day poppy appeal – you raised \$1400 plus – and I would like to thank Somers General Store for putting up with me on their porch

and the cups of coffee which kept me going. Also thanks to Sue and Greig in the Post Office – I got in their way, but it was all in a good cause.

I learned a lot about Somers just talking to you all.

Thank you very much indeed.

Lilian Beckerton



A cup of coffee after a cold morning selling remembrance poppies. It's almost as though the machine was placed there knowing that Lilian would be in dire need of resuscitation at some stage. Doing the honourable thing is Caelen of SGS.

If you came to reunions you will no doubt remember it was Lillian who persuaded you to part with your money for the raffles.