

*'Son', was born in Hythe in 1925 and loved his town and the bay which he called HIS bay.*

*A well - known figure in Hythe for all his life, he was chairman of Hythe band, property steward at our Methodist Church, gave many talks in the Kent area, and was a serving member on many committees.*

*I met Son in 1948 - we were married in 1950, and two children, five grand children and nine great grand children later I count myself blessed.*

*Through the years Son gave many talks and he had so many interesting stories that I continually implored - and then nagged - him to " write it down...write it down ". I DID win eventually and this is the result.*



*Son Griggs was named Wright, as was his father, grand father and great great grand father. This led to some confusion.*

*Son's grandfather, although christened Wright, was always known as Toby.*

*When Son's father arrived he was named Wright as well, and so they called him Son. When Son was named, he also was called Wright, but he was always known as Sonny ( or Son! ).*

*He acquired the name of Tiny by the fishing community, because he was big!*

*Unfortunately, in his later years, Son developed dementia, and we lost our much loved husband, father and granddad before he died. But he always had a ready smile - even if he couldn't find the words any longer. Son died on November 5. 2007. So we will always remember that date!*

*Even if you never knew him personally, I hope you get some measure of the man as you read his words.*

*Molly Griggs*



# Before the War



Left to right: Harry, Son, Gordon Bennett, Dick, John Young Son in the foreground

Two factors were to play an important part in shaping my life and would leave little doubt that I was destined to become an inshore fisherman.

The first being — Any male child born into a fishing family is regarded, from his first drawn breath, as a potential fisherman ... His very first toys are a boat and a piece of net with which he is endlessly encouraged to play at all times. If, for some unfortunate reason, a child refuses these toys and shows a complete lack of interest in fishing in general — then the ancestry of the mother is blamed. I was born into such a

family and wanted no other toy but a boat.

The second was when I was but two months old and suffering from a severe attack of whooping cough. My parents, in their desperation when all other forms of medication seemed to have failed, resorted to tying a plaice to my chest — with the result that I quickly recovered, and the plaice was cooked to a turn.

I look back to a very happy childhood; most of it would seem to have been spent with my father, trawling or her-ring- and mackerel-drifting out in the Channel. My father made it seem fun, but he was in fact preparing me for a life of long, oft times uncomfortable, hours in conditions that the average working man would not tolerate for twenty minutes. But also, at that time, I was learning the ways of nature — the sky building up to the south-west — the dark grey clouds forming an arch — “There’s Grandfather’s Archway — the wind’s looking- for an ‘ole to blow out of.” There were the long slow swells in a flat calm — “They’re telling you it is nie time your gear was got aboard” — the movements and habits of the different species of fish and effects of the weather upon them — countless lessons and observations to be learnt, to make a fisherman what he is — ‘A Hunter’.



Son with Alec Blizzard 1931.



The years between the wars were hard and like in most working homes at that time very little money was at hand — but I wanted for nothing except one thing ...

Every Saturday I would be taken by my father to a nearby town, and for a treat I would be allowed a sticky bun and a bottle of ‘pop’ and a seat amongst the local fishermen, listening to their talk of market prices and engines, of weather and boats ... then to the local boat chandler, who displayed in his window the one thing that I wanted most — a yacht, about two foot six inches long, rigged out with the most beautiful red sails — the price — £5. Mine wasn’t the only small nose flattened on that window and mine wasn’t the only father who could not afford £5.

Errands were run in an effort to raise the necessary money, but as the rewards were pretty equally divided between pennies, apples and chocolate cake, it was going to be a very long time before that yacht was mine.

Then came the Sunday when my mind was forced away from that picture of the boat chandlers by something that the Sunday School teacher was saying — “If there is something in this life that we really want, and Jesus feels we should have, then, we must pray for it.” This was the answer! It was going to be far easier than carting boxes of groceries around, and would leave a great deal more time for playing.

Instead of the customary hurried clasping of the hands and bending of the knees accompanied by a mumbled “Same as last night, Lord”, before quickly leaping into bed, I would spend ten minutes in earnest silent prayer, giving my father, no doubt, some concern as to whether I, at that early age, had decided to take up the ‘cloth’ rather than be a fisherman. Time and faith brought no result for the yacht remained in the chandler’s window.



It was Friday, late afternoon, and we were on passage to Rye Bay to catch mackerel. Down below in the small cabin tea was being got ready. A thick crust was cut from a new cottage loaf and handed to me accompanied by a large dab of butter and, as was the custom when a new pot of strawberry jam was opened, the ‘boy’ had first ‘go’, ensuring the best of the fruit, which in those days always seemed to find its way to the top. A sip of scalding hot tea from a pint pot and then that wonderful moment of the first bite as the jaws finally met, forcing butter and jam up into the nose and over the face.

“Thump! Thump! Thump!” — it was the signal from the man at the tiller on deck that all hands were needed up top in a hurry. Arms and legs seemed to be all over the place and I was left behind in the scramble for the hatch. I was roughly pulled through — concerned more for my bread and jam than any emergency.

I couldn’t believe my eyes, for there just ahead, her red sails set full and just about two foot six inches long, was the answer to my childish prayers, My father lifted it aboard, but somehow I could no longer see, for tears were quickly mingling with butter and strawberry jam.



“Come on, Son, the boats are ashore” — It was my mother. I tumbled from my bed, looked at the clock and saw it was 6 a.m.

Between mouthfuls of steaming hot porridge, I asked “How many they got then?” — “About a last a boat and don’t hang about — your father will be waiting for this jug of tea.” It was bitterly cold and I slipped a couple of times on the sheets of ice in the road as I hurried down to the beach, stopping on the corner of the rough road that led down to the beach for a sip from the big enamel jug.

A ‘last’ a boat — that’s 10,000 herrings each for the two boats that were herring drifting — all of which had to be shaken from the mile and a half of drift nets and counted out into boxes, a ‘warp’ at a time (a warp being four herrings). It would take until midday, and with luck my father would ignore the ringing of the school bell and I would have a whole morning fetching, carrying and counting the seemingly never ending pile of herrings that were shaken from the nets.

But not this morning — As the school bell began to ring, I climbed aboard the boat and hid in the cabin, hoping that I wouldn’t be missed. It wasn’t to be. “Come on, cut along now, you’ve had enough this morning. Get home and get washed before going to school and get a note from your mother to say why you are late.”

As I climbed out of the boat a thought struck me, and instead of going home I went straight on to school, already an hour late. I took my place by the large open fire.

Mr. Bigg laid down his chalk and made his way over to me — opened his mouth to deliver the usual remarks, stopped, sniffed twice and said “Boy, you stink. Go home and wash yourself”

The rest of the morning was happily spent on the golf links catching newts from the pond, which would sell at four for a half penny.

Another toy that I very much valued was a less sophisticated type of ‘Meccano’ called ‘Trix’. I managed to ac-



quire a fairly comprehensive set through birthday and Christmas presents and the bartering and bargaining at school which went under the heading of 'swops'. Quite a lot could be got by this last method. A few cigarette cards and a cap bomb would clinch a deal on a fresh water fishing float, or any other article that was of interest. It was, of course, recognised that if the owner of the fishing float or whatever was smaller or lacked support from a gang, then the trade was considerably one-sided.

My interest was in making working models, which were powered by an old clockwork gramophone motor, and with this I was well satisfied until one day I watched with envy a Meccano windmill being turned by a stationary steam engine. One of these I must have — but how? — and then I thought of 'Old Winkle'.

Old Winkle was just one of the many old characters that were around at the time. I spent a lot of time in his shed. On the shelves and on the table that served as a bench were so many small and interesting articles — most of which were made of brass. There seemed to be nothing that he couldn't make out of odds and ends. He always had time to stop and talk and show a great deal of interest in my own ideas and efforts. So it was to him that I turned to solve my problem of acquiring a steam engine.

The boiler was made from a small brass shell case, the cylinder and piston from brass cartridge cases, and the fly wheel was taken from my gramophone motor to complete what to me at that time, was the most beautiful thing I would ever own. It was agreed that I should be present at the first trial run. I was allowed to fill the gleaming little boiler with water and next to fill and light the methylated spirit burner which slid neatly into the 'fire box'. With anxious eyes I watched the shiny brass boiler begin to dull as it heated up, and noted, with some apprehension, the first hiss of steam as it escaped past the piston, then with a piercing whistle — when a small lever was pulled — the fly wheel began to turn, slowly at first, and then, picking up speed ran smoothly — if somewhat noisily — for a full five minutes, slowing down gradually as the burner ran dry, until it finally came to a stop. To this day I always associate the smell of methylated spirit and the hiss of steam with this moment.

### **Monday was Wash Day ...**

My mother had been up early to complete the weekly wash. A considerable amount of time had been spent on boiling, and an even longer time bent over the bath and wash board. It was a windy day with intermittent rain showers. I was not allowed out to play and had contented myself with my usual game of fishing complete with my boats, steam engine and a vivid imagination. My mother's frustration must have built up through continually stepping over my toys whilst taking out and bringing in armfuls of damp washing from the line in the garden each time it rained. The little engine had a full head of steam and was in the process of winching up one of the boats, when she came into the room and tripped over another boat that was fishing on the lino. Her frustration was such that she seized the first thing to hand and with a hearty kick, the steam engine, winch and boat went sailing across the room, ending up under the horse hair sofa — spilling methylated spirits over the floor, which instantly caught alight. Complete catastrophe was averted by using the damp washing to extinguish the flames and dispatching my steam engine through the kitchen window, where it landed in a crumpled heap by the back door.

I was never allowed to have a steam engine after that — and the horse hair sofa was never the same again.

"Boy! I asked for a composition about a sunrise. I didn't ask for a detailed account of the herring fleet at work. I sometimes think I might as well knock your head off and put a turnip on your shoulders for all the sense I can get into you."

Most boys at that time had jobs to do before going to school. For those that didn't there were always the inter-street football matches — Frampton Road versus Cobden Road, Park Road versus Stade Street and so on. Teams were not limited to eleven players a side — indeed, often there were anything up to forty on the field at the same time. The fact that a third of these at any given time were fighting amongst themselves,

settling misunderstandings that had nothing whatsoever to do with the game in question, did help to relieve the congestion in the goal mouth.

It was because I had missed three of these matches, having to deliver breakfast orders, that I became actively involved in my one and only industrial dispute.

On the morning in question, I arrived on the beach at 6.30 to have my bicycle loaded up with orders which would involve me in a round trip of three miles, calculated to get me back in time for assembly. I was feeling disgruntled for two reasons — my main interest in fish was the catching of it and not the selling of it and, secondly, I was very much feeling the overwhelming defeat of my street team, which had lost, the morning before, with a result of 10 - 0.

I set off and when I came to within 100 yards of my first delivery, a gust of wind lifted the canvas cover from the basket in the carrier. The same gust of wind also deposited my order list over the nearest hedge and, in trying to grab it, I lost control, resulting in my hitting the kerb, falling off and having all the orders fall out onto the road in one big confused heap. I viewed the scene with absolute disgust, then I threw the lot over a six foot garden wall, left my bike and made off as fast as I could to join my team in another resounding defeat of 8 - 1.

In school, the enormity of my evil began to dawn on me and by the time lunch break came I was feeling somewhat sick. When the dinner bell went, I knew I must go home and face whatever retribution there was in store for me.

I stood in the middle of that room, shamefaced, fully realising that whatever punishment I received, was justified. But, instead of punishment, I had my first fundamental lesson of business: just how much effort there had been involved in catching that fish — how much time and cost involved in preparing it — how much inconvenience involved to the customer — and finally, how much cost involved in replacing it.

I had begun to grow up.

## **The Green**

The 'Green' was used so much more in the thirties, than it is today. It was a focal point for most of our activities.

There was always a football pitch — with 'proper' goal posts and at least another three pitches in operation marked out by the use of jackets or a bundle of guernseys to show just where the goal posts would have been.

This method was always a bone of contention, as the goal keepers were apt to close the goal mouth gradually to a manageable width as the game progressed, causing considerable arguments, especially if a penalty had been awarded.

The inevitable fight solved nothing for the school bell would ring, informing the participants and other boys scattered over the sixteen acres of well used grass, that it was time to form up on the asphalt covered corner of the Green (opposite to the old weather boarded Royal British Legion Building).

Here, each class from Standard 1 to Standard 7 would form up in that order. The teacher in charge would give the order 'Silence' and then 'Right dress'. The right arm of each boy would then snap up — fingers just touching the next boys' shoulder — feet would shuffle until all arms were extended to their full length — then "Eyes front I ... Right turn I ... Quick march!" and the whole school would march off to the beat of a drum to their respective classes in a very orderly fashion.

Empire Day was a very important event and the Green was used to mark that occasion.

The whole school, girls and boys, would be formed up in classes and the Union Jack would be flying proudly from its tall flagpole — put there for the occasion. Around the base the Headmaster, Headmistress and all the town dignitaries would stand on a raised platform. The speech from the mayor was always scripted to instil in all paraded there. Great Pride in the British Empire and all its achievements.

The National Anthem would be sung with great gusto, bringing tears, no doubt, to the eyes of mums and dads, who came not only to see their children, but to be part of this great occasion.

The Hythe Town Military Band would play martial music as the boys marched past the flag — always led by a boy who had shown much promise (not necessarily in academics, but also in neatness, smartness and discipline).

Each boy would salute the flag and hold this salute until he was past the saluting base. On one occasion when nearing the base, the leading boy lost a shoe, but he didn't falter, he carried on and was awarded a sixpence for 'Leadership, Character and Ability' the three necessary ingredients that a boy must have to make his way in the World when he became a Man.



The fair shown around the 1950's

the extreme edge of the Green at the bottom of Cinque Ports Avenue) to draw water to wet the grass around the coal-fired steam engines, as a safety precaution against fire. Our reward would be a free ride occasionally on the Carousal.

To win a prize at the Hoop-La, Darts, Roll-a-Penny or Catch a-Duck was really a great event. Money was short and a penny would be carried, perhaps three or four times, around the entire fairground — the owner of the penny being followed by his friends who would give their 'expert' opinions on which stand gave the best return ... if he won.

We did win sometimes, albeit the Hoopla ring was nudged over the block holding the prize, by the stall owner, or the penny was pushed off the line for a 'Win', or a duck was picked out of the water and purposely hung on the ring hanging on the rod. Looking back now, it was good business to have a few happy smiling faces on boys and girls carrying their gold fish, teddy bears, toy cars and dolls around the fairground and answering the question 'Cor! Which stall did you win that on?'

Suddenly the fair had gone — overnight it had vanished and all that was left to remind anybody that it had ever been there, was a group of boys earnestly looking for the odd penny or half-penny which could have been dropped on the parched grass.

The Circus would not just arrive — its coming would have been advertised by the huge, colourful descriptive posters displayed all around the town and outlying districts weeks ahead.

Early on a Saturday morning the first caravans and wagons would arrive, (the wagons carrying the vast amount of equipment needed for the Big Top) and then later the cages holding the animals. We would make for the Green — not really to get a job, or to help in anyway, but to get in the 'riggers' way and encourage them to swear. It was a novelty to hear Bad Language in those days.

The Green accommodated the fairs and circuses, which were always much bigger than now, and always seemed to stay for a whole week. Both of them were very important events, involving not only the townspeople and their children, but families from the outlying country and town districts.

Some of the children of the 'Forrest Fair' would attend Hythe C. of E. School if the fair stayed longer than a week and we got to know them quite well, and were allowed sometimes to sit around the caravans and join in the conversations.

Steam engines provided the power to generate the electricity which drove the 'Chair-a-planes', the 'Carousal' and the 'Dodgems'. The summers in the 30s seemed always to be long and hot, and the Green parched brown. If I was lucky, I would be given a bucket to join with the other three or four boys who continually visited the stand-pipe (situated on

When everything was complete and we had looked at the lions and tigers, dogs, sea-lions and ponies, a group of boys (noticeably not girls!) would be gathered around the elephants — obviously more interested in the size of their droppings than the animals themselves.

‘How to see the show itself?’ was the next burning question. Security was tight, but many places were selected where it might be possible to crawl in under the canvas and not be noticed, to view the show from under the four tier stands. Some were successful ... many were not ... and these would be escorted out through the entertainers entrance and dispatched with a good hard slap around the ear ... hard enough to bring tears sometimes and certainly hard enough to discourage any further involvement in getting in to see the show, other than through the main entrance with a ticket.

That and ‘scrumping’ for apples and ‘Knock down Ginger’ (which entailed knocking on doors and running away) were the 30s versions of vandalism — a word I had never heard of until the 60s.

The Green was used for a summer camp for the Army ... whether for the Territorials or the Regulars I cannot remember ... but I do remember those thick door-step sandwiches (fishpaste followed by plum jam), tea drunk from a chipped enamel pint mug ... sitting among the soldiers ... my tea a reward for getting water for the gun-carriage horses.

The Green ... It was a 16 acre playground. What other schools could possibly compete with that? Football, cricket rounders, tag, Hot Rice, war games (which the British always won) cowboys and Indians (which the cowboys always won). It was an important part of our growing up, for as we reached our teens, we could always find a quiet spot along the fringe edge bordering the ranges (now the Primary School) where innocent caresses and kisses often foretold a long and lasting happy partnership.

## **The School**

The Girls and Boys Schools were separate in ‘my day’.

The boys were in the schoolrooms in St. Leonard’s Road, then came the Head Masters house adjoining it, and around the corner was the girls school. The Primary School was in the building across the playground.

The head master of the Boys School was Mr. Hawkins. The headmistress of the Girls School was Miss Wheeler. And the headmistress of the Primary School was Miss Bates.

All three of them, and their dedicated staff, were responsible for bringing out the best in every one of the pupils who passed through these schools and their respective classes.

Family names followed through continually from the time of its opening — Griggs, Blackman, Cloake, Burgess, Dray, Lee, Wonfer, Smith, Godden — to name but a few!

Discipline was strict but just, each boy knowing how far he could go before warranting punishment. The punishments given were — staying in after school, writing out a date or sentence anything from 100 to 500 times, or, the ultimate, THE CANE. I was awarded all three, at different times and in different amounts, throughout my stay there, and in each case I feel sure it was justified and did me no harm whatsoever — in fact it prepared me for the years ahead which were to change my life so dramatically.

“How many times have I told you, boy, never end a sentence with a preposition. Write it out 300 times.” Now, everybody, including our news readers, end their sentences with prepositions. They wouldn’t if they had attended Hythe C. of E. School in the 30s!

“The only way I can get you to remember the date of the signing of the Magna Carta is to write 1215 five hundred times.” I always remembered it — Mr. Biggs did a good job on me, but for sixty years nobody wanted to know the date when the Magna Carta was signed, until in 1995 my wife and I were touring Dover Castle in an organised group. The guide was describing something and I wasn’t paying much attention until I heard her say “Could anyone tell me the date of the signing of the Magna Carta?”

“I can” I said smugly, “It was 1512!”

There was never any homework given — the reason I feel sure was because a lot of the boys had jobs to do after school, delivering groceries etc. — and the shortage of money in homes was of course recognised. The punishment of staying in school after hours was often adapted to meet this situation.

All boys wore short trousers until the age of twelve and on their twelfth birthday they were bought their first pair of long trousers, usually made of grey flannel, and these trousers, without a doubt, were a 'status symbol' respected by the under twelves and by the teachers alike. It was noticeable that we were treated in a different manner somehow, and when we reached Standard 7 (the highest in the school), it was possible to discuss a problem, academic or not, and extra tuition was given if asked for. (I did that on purpose!)

## Leaving

It was the end of summer term 1933 and twelve boys, all aged fourteen, stood outside the headmaster's office, waiting for the last interview before leaving school to start work in the different jobs that their fathers had acquired for them.

The office was situated in the corner of Standard Five classroom and all of us were very conscious of the looks of awe and admiration, and also of envy, of those eleven year olds — for any boy who was fourteen years old, had reached the ultimate in academic education — Standard Seven.

My name was called and I took up the customary position when in the presence of the headmaster in his office — standing rigidly to attention. But this time there was not the long wait while he finished whatever he seemed to find necessary on his desk, neither was there the long look over his half glasses before saying, "Well, boy, you know full well why you are here. What have you got to say for yourself?" Instead, I heard, barely able to believe my ears, "Sit down, young man, I have just a few things to say to you before you leave this school ... " It took just five minutes and a firm handshake, and I left feeling no longer a schoolboy. I automatically saluted the very large Union Jack hanging from the wall opposite and read the school motto painted in large letters on the beam dividing the classrooms for the last time 'Manners Maketh Man', and left with just two main thoughts in my mind.

One — tomorrow I would be a fisherman, and

Two — "He knows what he can do with his night school!"



Sunday night at ten thirty, I took my place as a crew member aboard my father's boat the 'Gratitude'. She was thirty foot long with an eleven foot beam, built of elm planking on oak frames and made as a dual purpose drifter/trawler. She was powered by two petrol paraffin engines — one of fourteen horse power and the other seven. These, among, numerous other jobs, were soon to be my responsibility.

These engines required a certain 'knack' to get them started — and a considerable amount of patience to keep them running. There was no ignition switch or starter button and so a set process had to be followed, which was simplicity itself — if somewhat dangerous. If they were cold, it was first necessary to remove the sparking plugs, place them on the shovel blade, squirt them liberally with petrol from the 'dope can' and set fire to them. When they were considered warm enough, they were removed (with the help of a piece of rag), wiped clean and quickly screwed back into the engine. The petrol priming caps were unscrewed, more petrol was squirted into the cylinder head, the petrol tap was turned on, the starting handle quickly fitted into the starting 'dog' on the large flywheel, which was then given a hearty swing — and if all went well — the engine started.





All this had to be carried out in the very small space up 'forrard' between decks, with no more headroom than three foot six inches, which served as the 'engine room'. Of course, sometimes things got out of hand, and a flaming shovel complete with spark plugs would be seen to sail out of the engine room hatch, whilst a furious beating with an old coat or oilskin went on below.

If the engine was really stubborn it was necessary to squirt petrol also on the air valve — this was a great help, unless the engine backfired, then drastic action was taken with the help of the fire extinguishers. These did put out the fire, but it was essential for the operator to beat a hasty retreat before being overcome with fumes. After the engines had been running for ten to fifteen minutes, the vapouriser was hot enough for the paraffin to be turned on, which allowed the engines to be run for a third of the cost of petrol.

If they stopped, the first fault to look for was a blocked fuel line. This was cleared by simply unscrewing the pipe from the tank and blowing through it, or unscrewing the pipe from the engine and sucking through it.

Whichever way it was done, a considerable amount of paraffin was swallowed, causing much discomfort in the stomach region and leaving a taste in the mouth that no amount of hot sweet tea would remove.

Long hours were spent at sea herring- and sprat-catching through the winter months with mackerel-catching at night, and trawling by day throughout the summer. Being the 'boy' I was on a quarter share. This method of payment still stands today in the inshore fishing industry, and all inshore fishermen are still known as 'Share hands'. If the boat is skipper owned and has a crew of three men, then all expenses such as fuel, food, stamps etc. are deducted from the amount realised from the catch. The remainder of the money is then usually split five ways ... two shares for the boat and gear, one share for the skipper and one each for the crew, although in some cases the skipper will take one and a quarter shares.

In those early days, my father would come down to the beach with notes and loose change wrapped up in his tanned smock, always on a Saturday morning with all crew members mustering for the share out. First the notes were put round in the number of shares required, then the silver and lastly the copper. Any odd coppers left over went to the 'boy' — an extra to his quarter share.



#### **HYTHE BAY LIFEBOATS.**

In the 1830s lifeboats were stationed at Folkestone, Seabrook, Hythe, Dymchurch, Littlestone and Dungeness. The reason for this was that if a sailing vessel got into trouble, the lifeboat to the windward would be launched, so that it could sail or be rowed down to the casualty. If the weather was too bad for the boat to return to its station after the rescue, it would make for another station and return to its own when the weather moderated.

Until the first lifeboat was stationed in 1826 at St. Mary's Bay (Dymchurch), heroic rescues were made by fishermen from Folkestone, Hythe, Dymchurch, Littlestone and Dungeness and also by the coastguards stationed at Sandgate, St. Mary's Bay and Lade, using their own boats. Many lost their lives in the many rescue attempts. In December 1837, the Dymchurch lifeboat was launched in a full gale to go to the rescue of a vessel. Despite a successful rescue, the boat was badly damaged and the station was closed down, but rescue work was still carried on by the fishermen and coastguards.

It was sixteen years before another lifeboat was put into service — this time stationed at Dungeness. This was quickly followed by lifeboats being stationed at Folkestone, Seabrook, Dymchurch and Littlestone. The Seabrook boat was moved to Hythe in 1893.

With the coming of steam and internal combustion engines and also the lifeboats themselves being motorized, it was not necessary to keep all the stations open, so only Hythe and Dungeness were left. Unfortunately, the Hythe boat was lost at Dunkirk, but as the need to replace it with another was considered unnecessary, the station closed in 1940.

However, rescue work from Hythe did not stop — many lives were saved by Buller Griggs (holder of the RNL silver medal for gallantry) using the family's fishing boats. In the 1950s, Sonny Griggs, nephew of Buller Griggs,

took over and kept the rescue service going until 1960, when the RNLI introduced their Inshore Rescue Boat Scheme. He then placed himself, his crew and his fishing boat at the disposal of the RNLI, thus giving the service official recognition. With the introduction of the fast inshore boat at Littlestone and the use of helicopters, it was considered unnecessary for coverage to be given at Hythe. Sonny Griggs retired from the Inshore Rescue Boat Scheme in 1974 — thus finishing an unbroken family connection of eighty three years of life-saving at Hythe.

### **CALLING OUT THE LIFEBOAT.**

Before the war years, the call-out signal was the firing of two maroons. These were fired from the Life Boat Station at 30 second intervals between the explosions. Just two charges were used, and they were very loud explosions, believe me! One charge only was used to call out the Fire Brigade.

What a relief it was for the family when, with a howling gale outside our small cottage in the early hours of the morning, one loud explosion would be heard, followed by no other — that would be a call for the firemen to man their engine — sighs of relief all round!

I was involved with the lifeboat at Hythe from an early age. My job, when called, was to get my father's lifebelt ready for him. He was 2nd coxswain and I was proud to be seen buckling his belt on him. His brother, Buller, was coxswain and six of the family of Griggs, with two other volunteers manned the 'Viscountess of Wakefield' of Hythe — the last lifeboat in Hythe, 1936-1940.

My next job was to help with the launching of the lifeboat, and my next was to run home and tell my mother and sister that the lifeboat had 'got away alright'

When the invasion of Britain by the Germans seemed almost certain to happen, the use of maroons was no longer used. The few people left in Hythe were anxious enough, without loud explosions going off through the night!

So another method was used. Four of us early teenage boys would be issued with a fog horn, that had to be blown by the mouth, and we would race around the town, on our bicycles, blowing the fog horns, until we were out of breath — it worked alright! How the fireman were called out I do not know.



# Defending Hythe

All too soon it was 1939 and the beginning of World War Two. For the first few months things changed but very little ... fishermen in the Naval Reserve went back into the Navy, but with fishing it was business as usual.

After the fall of France things changed drastically — fishing was limited to one hour after dawn till one hour before dark, local fishermen began to leave their boats to join either the Patrol Service or the Royal Navy, boat's crews were shortened up because of lack of experienced men, and it was in 1941 that I became a full share man.

It was then, too, that I volunteered for the Home Guard, which was of course made up mostly of young lads and middle aged men. Invasion was expected at any moment.

The patrol of my particular section was a mile of sea front — the patrol consisting of four hours on and the rest of the night off.

One night, I and another young lad had the midnight to 4 a.m. patrol — a duty which we took very seriously.

Not for a moment did we ever consider that the Germans would come, for as children our games had nearly always been war games and it was an accepted fact that the British always won. It was with this false sense of security and our one rifle and five rounds of ammunition and one Thompson sub-machine gun with no ammunition, that we completed one leg of our patrol on this particular rather dark cold night. Seeing nothing, we turned round to make our way back to the starting point. It was then that we spotted a movement on the opposite side of the promenade. Jack quickly slammed a round up the breech and I cocked my sub-machine gun in a manner that must have sounded as if half a regiment had landed. Before I could shout "Halt, who goes there?" a voice screamed out of the darkness, "Don't shoot, I surrender!" We closed in quickly, only to find a very frightened soldier not very much older than ourselves — who said on seeing who we were, "Thank God ... I thought they were here ... I thought they'd come."

Then, with relief at being spared, we were given our first lesson in service foul language — which came in handy, for it wasn't to be long before both of us were ourselves serving in the Royal Navy.

One man had a shotgun and it was looked upon as the proud possession of the entire section of Hythe Home Guard. We had a gun!

All training centred around this weapon and it was jealously guarded by its owner, because, when it was not used for training purposes, it was used with considerable success in supplementing the small meat ration. The owner was a poacher and skilled at shooting rabbits. His name was John and he was very old — he must have been all of 40.

I asked if I could go out with him one time and it was agreed that, as long as I didn't make any noise and kept my mouth shut, I could go.

It was evening time and the area we were to work was large. I was sworn to secrecy for it was popular with other poachers, who were unpopular with quite a lot of other people. There were a few rabbits just sitting about near their warren who quickly dispersed as soon as they sensed danger. "We'll use the ferrets," said John, "and hopefully net a few when the rabbits bolt." All the 'bolt holes' were netted — I couldn't really see any difference between one hole or another. Out of the sack came Billy, John's prize ferret. He soon disappeared down a hole and after three minutes or so, there was a lot of fearful noise going on underground.



“Damn,” said John, “He has fixed one and he won’t come out until he’s ready — he will lay up with it. We will have to move further away and start again. We might be able to pick him up after an hour.”

A fresh spot was selected even though there were no rabbits about. The holes were netted with the remaining nets, the other ferret put down a hole, and it wasn’t long before a rabbit bolted and was caught. Soon another did the same thing and then another. The ferret appeared and just sat looking around. John dispatched the three netted rabbits, collected the nets, picked up the ferret and put him in the sack, and said, “We’ll go back for Billy. He should be up now. I’m happy with these three.” But Billy wasn’t up. “I’m not going until I get him. He is too good to lose — We’ll smoke him out.” He checked the netted holes. They were alright. He then collected dry grass and damp grass, mixed it up and put it at the top of the only UN-netted hole and lit it. A lot of smoke came out of a lot of holes, but no Billy. The three rabbits were gutted and the intestines laid in selected holes, but nothing happened.

It was beginning to get dusk and John was beginning to lose his temper. “Damn ferret! I’m going to kill it! He won’t be any good any more — I’m going to kill it!” He took THE GUN, which was slung on his back, the gun which was the pride and joy of Number 4 Section of Hythe Home Guard. He loaded both barrels and, in his deranged state, rammed the gun deep into the one remaining un-netted hole and squeezed the triggers. There was a loud explosion, which threw John flat on his back. I helped him up, but my laughter didn’t help at all — his language was quite unacceptable.

The smoke began to clear, giving us the view of two thirds of the shot gun protruding from the now enlarged hole.

“Come on, John, Get your gun and let’s get off home before it gets too dark,” I said.

He went forward and picked up the ‘pride and joy’ of Number 4 Section, and just stood there looking, not believing what he was seeing, for both barrels had peeled back to half their lengths and looked like a half-peeled banana. He was distraught. Not only had he possibly killed the ferret — he had definitely ruined the gun.

The following Sunday morning Hythe Home Guard mustered for the usual inspection and they looked a fine body of men.

All of them now in uniform and two thirds of them had been issued with Ross rifles which were of 1914-1918 vintage, and just five rounds of ammunition. Six of us were issued with Thompson machine guns and six magazines, but, alas, no bullets.

The order ‘was given ‘Shoulder Arms’, and this was done in a very orderly fashion — even the ‘broom stick’ soldiers looked quite professional.

The inspecting officer was very pleased with what he was seeing, until he reached the middle of the front row. There stood a man who looked the part of a true soldier, smartly turned out, standing to attention, his eyes looking about six inches above the officer’s head. His shoulder arms had not gone quite as expected of him for the barrels only just reached his shoulder.

“Tell me, man. Is that the shot gun that is the pride and joy of Section 4?”

“Yes, sir.”

“What happened to it?”

“Well sir, you have always told us to expect close quarter fighting and so I decided to saw off quite a bit of the barrels, giving a far greater scattering area for the pellets.”

“We will discuss this further in my office. Report to me after parade.”

John was not punished as we expected he would be. Perhaps it was the promise of two large fat rabbits to help out the meat ration. Only two men will ever know.



The platoon used to meet on a Sunday morning for training — sometimes in the training hut in the Ministry of Defence ground on the corner of Scallions Bridge and Dymchurch Road. Other times, for different types of training — such as bayonet practice — in the Reachfields, charging straw-filled sacks representing the German enemy.



Son with Tom Taverner and Alec (Blow'ard') Blizzard

On the Roughs was a mock-up trench system- it seems inconceivable now, that we were trained in trench warfare. After sessions on the Roughs, we would be marched back to the Light Railway, halted, brought to attention and ordered to dismiss. A big rush would develop to get into the café (which was then at the back of the building), where Mr. and Mrs. Farmer, who always showed a keen interest in us young lads, would make sure we all had a cup of tea and a sticky bun.

I remember evening sessions in the Home Guard building where we learned aircraft identification, enemy paratroop recognition and use of the machine gun.

Unarmed combat was talked about, but not encouraged, for a large proportion of the Home Guard were 'elderly' and many had served in the 1914-1918 war. These men, of course, were the backbone of the Home Guard nationwide.

One form of defence against tanks was not looked upon with any enthusiasm. A new device had been brought out in the form of a 'sticky bomb'. This was a ball shaped container full of explosive on top of a wooden handle. The use of this entailed stripping off the outer covering of the ball exposing the very sticky surface. The object then was to run forward and hit the tank with it ... The bomb would stick on. A hasty retreat was very necessary.

The Roughs were used as a training area for the regular army and the Home Guard, and a mock-up of a redoubt was built behind barbed wire. One Sunday morning, Hythe Home Guard mustered on the Roughs, resplendent in new uniforms and fully armed with 1914-1918 equipment. A sergeant from the School of Infantry was in charge. He informed us that there was not time to train us in the advantages of cover given by folds in the ground — this was to be a 'death or glory' charge of the 'redoubt' nestled safely behind the barbed wire.

"I want volunteers. All men 5ft 11 and over ... one pace forward," he said.

Without hesitation I stepped proudly forward with a dozen others.

"You are the elite of this company. This operation cannot succeed without you. You will leave your rifles and weapons behind you and when I blows my whistle you charge forward and throw yourselves on the wire. The remainder of you will charge with your weapons, shouting suitable bloodthirsty oaths, and run up the backs of the men on the wire ...You will not hesitate, but surge forward and take the redoubt." Before anyone could have second thoughts about the outcome, the whistle blew and those of us who were the elite surged forward and threw ourselves on the wire ... It hurt ... but the whistle blew again and it seemed to me that the entire company ran up my back and over the wire. I lay on the wire dismayed and bleeding, sharing little, if any, enthusiasm that the redoubt had fallen, and I vowed that this would definitely be the last time I would volunteer for anything. Having said that, it was only a short time later that I volunteered for the Royal Navy on my 17th birthday ... But that's another story.



### **Land Mine Incident 24<sup>th</sup> Feb. 11.30 am, 1941: Witness Account.**

I was 16 years old at the time, and a fisherman. A lot was happening in February 1941. A sea mine field had been laid in Hythe Bay and also a boom defence system.

Land mines had been sown on the seaward side of Hythe Gas Works, which were situated at the end of Range Road. This minefield was heavily wired with 'gannet' barbed wire.

Another anti-invasion system was being erected right along the coast, consisting of metal scaffold poles, forming a gantry, with mines bolted on them at set distances. At high water this defence system could not be seen. I am sure these mines were never primed. A lot of these poles and fittings were stored in the gas works yard.

On the morning in question, a group of soldiers — I can't remember if they were the Pioneer Corps or the Kings Own Yorkshire Light Infantry (both regiments being in this area at this time) — marched along the foreshore stopping outside the wire directly in front of the gas works yard. Presumably, an entrance was made through the wire, for there was a loud explosion. I ran along the safe passage that had been left between the wall of the gas works yard and the wire. One soldier lay dead outside the wire and another could be seen holding a white handkerchief up in the air, from the crater.

An officer — of what rank or regiment I do not know — ordered that a long plank be brought over to him. I did not witness his action as I was sent to get grappling irons and rope, but was told that he cut the wire and laid the long plank from the wire to the lip of the crater. He refused to let any man come with him as he went to get the four injured men out. The bodies left were removed by the use of grappling irons. As far as I remember, there were 10 killed and 4 injured.

P.S. The mine field was swept and declared free of mines, soon after the war in Europe finished. A Hythe civilian walking across it in 1946 was blown up and killed.

### **Friendly Fire, circa 1940-2**

Alban White worked for many years for the Griggs family, and was a very good fisherman and a great friend of mine. He also worked for Newmans, taking fish from Hythe to Hastings and Brighton in one of their lorries.

It was on such a trip that Alby and I were introduced to the full meaning of 'friendly fire'.

On this occasion I was in the cab with him, as I had been on a number of occasions. We had loaded up with herrings and had got to get to Hastings or Brighton before daylight, because that was when the markets opened. It was still dark by the time we reached the Grand Redoubt and the check point that was situated about four hundred yards further on.

It did not seem to be manned so we drove on. A couple of minutes later we heard a shot. I said to Alby, "You'd better stop!" He did so and the next thing was a banging on the window, which Alby wound down, framing a very frightened, rather young face, peering in the cab.

"Why didn't you stop? — why didn't you stop, when I shouted 'Halt'?"

"How the hell do you think we could hear you, or anyone else shout 'Halt', when we are stuck in this cab with all the engine noise — was it you who shot at us?"

"Yes it was, I had to do it — I had to do it!"

I leaned across Alby and said to this very sick looking young soldier, "Look, calm down, calm down" Alby said, "By the look of you, you could do with a good stiff brandy — and a roll of toilet paper would not come amiss either!" He stepped down and was replaced by a sergeant. (You don't have to see their stripes — you can always tell by their method of dealing with a complicated situation — he was good, this chap.)

"I'm going to take you in for further questioning." "Look," said Alby, "We are loaded with herrings which have to be got to Brighton before daylight. Give us a break, nobody was hurt."

“O.K. — but I must stress, Sir, that the Sergeant’s mess are very fond of fresh fish — particularly herrings!!” We carried on and arrived at our destination just as the market was opening. The Sergeant’s mess, although very fond of fresh fish, would, in due course, not be very fond of fresh herring. We did leave rather a lot ...

## November 2nd 1940

In 1940 the fishermen of Hythe, Folkestone and Dungeness were allowed to fish only in Hythe Bay, and could only leave the beach or harbour from one hour after sunrise and return one hour before sunset. These restrictions were made because of the possible and expected invasion by the Germans on our shore line. I was a member of a crew of four who were returning back to our beach, giving ourselves plenty of time to conform with the restrictions, with a good catch of fish making it a very worthwhile trip. With half an hour to go before landing, we saw a German aircraft, which looked very much like an ME 109, flying along the coast and then over our town. We learned later that he had been machine-gunning at low level and had bombed the town bridge.

We in the boat, of course, were not aware of what had happened and didn’t know the strength of feeling of the townspeople.

When we landed we found a large number of people from the town — all of them very angry — and knowing what we were going to be ordered to do by the military and the police. The German had been shot down by troops manning a light AA gun on Number 22 Martello Tower, and was seen to crash a mile and a half to two miles out at sea. We were ordered to return to sea, because he was seen to have got out of his aircraft and was afloat on a rubber dinghy. It was blowing now quite hard from the North, which meant he would soon double the distance by blowing out to the South.

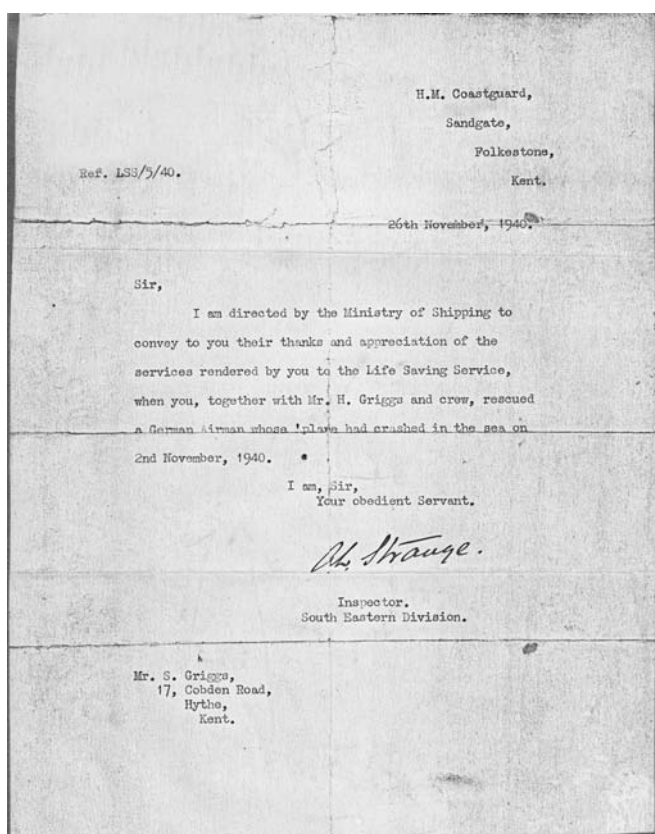
The catch was being unloaded as quickly as possible, but we made our feelings known in a very positive way. We were really not interested in turning round to go to sea again, to rescue this German, who had just machine gunned our town.

“You are being ordered to do this, because we wish to interrogate him and he may have important information that we need”

“Well that’s it, lads,” said Buller, and we all agreed. The boat was launched again and out we went. We spotted him three miles out on his dinghy, but also became aware of a convoy of ships sailing up channel from East to West. We had only just got him aboard when there was a vast amount of air activity. The convoy was being

attacked by the Germans who in turn were being attacked by the RAF, who were doing a grand job of it. The Germans also had with them a ‘Red Cross’ seaplane which was busy rescuing their shot down pilots, but they were getting too close to us for comfort, for they were escorted by two ME 109s. One of them came straight for us, flying very low, so ‘this was it’ — We quickly kicked our sea boots off and got out of our oil skins. He went by, but turned and came back again. Our German was going in and out of consciousness and was in shock, but as the ME 109 approached I managed to lift him and stuck up my thumb to the pilot, who waved and went on his way.

Our man was in a bad way and needed attention, which I tried to give, for he was going to be no good for interrogation if he was dead when we landed him. It was then that I noticed that the belt that passed between his legs that held his life jacket in position, was very tight and was giving him a lot of discomfort and stress. His eyes were shut and I picked up my knife. I leaned over him and had just got hold of the strap from between his



legs when he opened his eyes. He misjudged my intentions and obviously someday wanted to be a father, for he found the strength to shout “Nein, nein!”, in an appealing sort of way. I quietened him down, cut the strap which obviously made him more comfortable, and lifted him up so that he could see over the boat’s gunwale — we were nearly ashore. “England!” I said, “England! Deutschland ist kaput! For you, the war is over!”

He had a ring on his third finger left hand, which was gold with a swastika set in onyx. He didn’t take his eyes off me, when conscious, and now he pointed to this ring and pointed to me — he wanted me to have it. I, of course, refused. We had always been instructed never to remove any article or badge from the clothing of a prisoner. This I honoured.

I wondered how we were going to get him in the RAF Ambulance, for the feeling around the boat was very hostile, but he was put on a stretcher and carried up the beach. By the time he got to the ambulance he had no German badges, insignia, or markings on his uniform at all ...

The Army and the Royal Air Force took over and they were soon on their way to commence interrogation. I had always wanted to say to a German prisoner, “For you, the war is over!” I wonder what happened to him.



The Canadians stationed at Sandling during the 1914-1918 war, spent a lot of their free time in Hythe. They soon got attached to our town and some made life-long friends with families who welcomed them into their homes.

Number 6 Cobden Road was no exception. After moving from Arthur Road the Griggs family moved to this new address and continued to increase the family to 14. They were a very strong religious family, being totally Salvationist.

Many of the Canadians worshipped in local churches and some came to the Salvation Army Hall in Portland Road. They were, of course, made welcome and many found their way to Number 6. Old family photographs show the nine daughters of the family to be strikingly good looking young women.

One of the Canadians soon became very attached to one of these daughters, but soon the regiment received its marching orders — their destination — the Western Front.

Long bitter months passed, many died in the mud of Flanders fields and many more died in the trenches in other areas of this terrible warfare.

One morning, just as it was beginning to get light, one of the ‘Griggs girls’ came downstairs to use the toilet, which was situated in the back yard of the house. She opened the door and was shocked to see a soldier, smothered from head to foot in mud, his uniform in tatters, fast asleep ... At first she could not believe what she was seeing, for that soldier was ‘Jack’, her Canadian boyfriend — those many months ago. He was woken very gently, for he was physically and completely exhausted. He had disembarked at Folkestone from the leave ship in the early hours of the morning — walked to Hythe, and then, not wanting to wake the family so early had chosen to sleep in the toilet. He was bathed, his clothing washed, and, when rested, received a well-deserved welcome from the family.

Jack returned to France — he survived and returned to Hythe and married Dorothy, settling in Slaybrook, in one of the little old cottages on the Sandling Road. He became gardener and Dorothy was the cook at the ‘big house’. (This house was situated at the bottom of the lane opposite Sandling Station. It was destroyed by a bomb in the last war — dropped by a ‘hit and run’ raider.)

They were still there in the thirties, when I spent many happy hours with my Aunt Dot and Uncle Jack.

Jack never — ever — talked about his experiences in the Great War.



## Hythe Bay 1940

After the evacuation of the B.E.F. from Dunkirk and the fall of France, the invasion of Great Britain was thought to be imminent. A series of mine fields were sown in Hythe Bay, and land mines were sown on the foreshore from the west end of West Parade to the Grand Redoubt.

On the extreme west end of West Parade, a small concrete fortification was built, consisting of a gun emplacement and an emplacement for a machine gun. A vast fortification of gannet barbed wire stretched from Folkestone to Dungeness.

On the sea front, at the south end of Twiss Road, (where the car park now stands), a large gun battery was built, housing two 6" Royal Navy guns — the magazines for these guns were under the road and an entrance to them was from the grounds of the Hotel Imperial.



On the foreshore below high water, a fortification against landing craft, built of metal scaffold poles with mines attached, stretched from Folkestone to Dungeness. To complete these hurried defences, a floating 'boom' was laid half a mile or so from the shore — this again was a defence against landing craft.

No fishing boats were allowed to go to sea until one hour after daylight and had to be ashore, or in harbour, one hour before dusk. Because of severe German and British air activity in the Channel, the boats at Hythe moved to Denge Marsh, which is on the west side of Dungeness Point. A small fishing community lived and fished from there and welcomed the fishermen that crewed the boats belonging to the Griggs family.

In 1940, three landing 'hards' for landing craft and landing 'ships' were built on Hythe's foreshore — one at the Hotel Imperial, one at the top of Stade Street and another at the 'fishermen's beach'. When completed each hard had its own three piers, reaching from mean high water mark to mean low water mark.

The piers and hards were built especially for our coming invasion somewhere on the French coast and each pier had its own facilities to supply diesel oil and fresh water to the various types of landing craft. Landing craft and landing ships were expected to tie up at the piers to have their diesel and water tanks filled, and a full stock of ammunition would be supplied.

Ultimately, of course, these were never used, but without a doubt they saved the lives of many troops and sailors, because the invasion from England was expected, by the Germans, to be in the Calais area, and the provision of the hards in our area would confirm this. A vast amount of German troops were held in readiness in the Calais area for months on end. The invasion from England took place along the Normandy coast as we all know. There were a set of hards and piers at Stokes Bay, which is situated west of Portsmouth. These were used quite a lot in the first several weeks of Operation 'Overlord' by the six thousand or so landing craft and ships going over to their various beaches — to see so many ships and craft of all shapes and sizes going 'one way' was a wonderful sight. The landing ships carried a vast amount of vehicles and their crews.

# In the Navy

LST stood for Landing Ship Tanks  
LCI stood for Landing Craft Infantry  
LCA stood for Landing Craft Assault

I served on LST 199 for 4 years, and our interpretation of LST was LARGE SLOW TARGET — To those of us who served in the engine rooms, 4 decks down, it was of very little comfort to know that!



## LST 199

We left Portsmouth in February 1943 on a P 13 draft for an unknown destination.

We were classified as sailors, although I would think it would be safe to say that 90% of the draft had never even been to sea, and, for quite a large proportion of the draft when they first arrived at Pompey, it was the first time they had ever seen the sea.

I was brought up in a fishing family and had spent the whole of my 17 years either at sea or in it. The furthest I had ever travelled from my home in Hythe, Kent was to visit Brentwood in Essex (the home of my Aunt Paul and Uncle Gordan). For me to have done that in the years of 1936 to 1938 was considered quite an experience for a youngster.

So for me the grand adventure had started — we had 6 weeks training at Malvern and a further 2 weeks training at Chatham, learning all about diesel engines. We had been in the Navy just two months — we were 'sprogs', but as we were marched to the Harbour Station, we hoped we didn't look it, for our collars had been scrubbed and bleached to the accepted 'faded blue', that the old hands wore. Our 'tiddly' bows were alongside the H.M.S. on our cap tallies and not over the left ear and tied 'Pussa' fashion. 'Steaming bags' carrying the bare essentials for a voyage were slung nonchalantly on the left shoulder and, in the right hand, a brown cardboard attaché case was swung in time to the march.

At last we were on the move, and in the next 24 hours we were stopped, started, shunted and turned around so many times, that all sense of direction was lost. Everyone was so tired, dirty and hungry that nobody really cared any more where we were going. But, eventually, the train pulled into Greenock station and we were mustered and marched down to the quayside and taken out to the 'Empress of Scotland' in which we were to take passage to New York.

The voyage took eight days — That, and the first glimpse of the New York skyline, the short stay in Asbury Park, New Jersey, in the transit hotel, the uncomfortable five days journey from Asbury Park to New Orleans is another story in itself.

We stood on the quayside at the end of Canal Street, New Orleans and looked out across the Mississippi — four strange looking ships were tied up on the other side. They looked like small tankers with the bridge and deck houses set right aft, but what created the most interest were the six tall funnels spaced out along the deck.

"There you are 'Lofty', I told you we were picking up a convoy escort ship — bloody hell! — Jerry will have to have his finger out to catch us in one of these. Six funnels!- 'Struth!"



(There were in fact fourteen — not six — and were not funnels, but ventilation fans to withdraw fumes from the tank deck.)

On the ferry going over we began to pick out more features. There were six oerlikons (anti-aircraft guns), two forward, one on the port bow and one on the starboard, two on the forward end of the deckhouse, port and starboard, and two on the after end of the deckhouse, port and starboard. Right aft was a breech loading 12 pounder on a raised platform. It looked impressive, but as we got nearer we could see that the bows had doors, and that the bows were blunt and the sides were flat. In fact, they were without a doubt, blunt-bowed, slab sided beamy ships, designed for a specific purpose — and the letters on the bows said it all L ... S ... T ... Landing Ship Tanks.



I went up the gangplank in a bit of a daze and can remember only one thing very clearly, and that was the remark from a Sub. Lieutenant — reminding me, in his own way, that in future I must always salute the Quarter Deck. I had only just stepped aboard my first ship and I was already in trouble.

She was big for a landing vessel — 290 feet long and a beam of 50ft. The deckhouse contained the Wardroom and Officers' accommodation, with the wheelhouse and bridge on top. The crew accommodation was right aft, one deck down, and was to be home for 90-plus ratings and Petty Officers.

The tank deck was large and the need for the 'six funnels' was obvious, to cope with the exhaust fumes from the vehicles carried in its depths. The troop accommodation was from right forward to right aft, adjoining the crew quarters, port and starboard.

She wasn't going to be a fast ship — in fact, she could just manage 12 knots, but was far more comfortable at a steady 10.

She was to be my home for three years — years packed with experiences never to be forgotten, of places visited which were red on the atlas, representing the Empire of Great Britain, of Combined Operations in action that were to shape the world's future destiny, of true comradeship that can never be experienced in peacetime. I enjoyed those years, for LST 199 was a 'happy ship'.

Four years passed, leaving behind memories that can only be shared and appreciated by those who took part in the events that changed history.

Italy, Sicily, North Africa, the Far East, America — Countries and cities only read of before in books, or marked

red in the atlas ... The thrill of the New York skyline and the disappointment that nobody we met remotely resembled James Cagney or Humphrey Bogart ...

... The overwhelming kindness of the American people, meeting us at the dockyard gates and taking us to their homes or a night on the town each seemingly to have ancestors who came from London, England, or Glasgow, Scotland.

“You British, Mac?”

“Er ... yes”

“How about getting up in front of those mikes and telling these people they just gotta buy more War Bonds?”

“Er ... What shall I say?”

“Tell them about your war experiences — Start homely like. Ma and Pa left at home in the bomb shelters — sister, a nurse in the hospital looking after the wounded. Build it up to your fight coming across the Atlantic and sock ‘em with ‘You just gotta give us material to beat those goddamned Nazis’. Not scared are you?”

“No, I’m not scared, but I feel I ought to tell you that my mother and father — in fact, everybody’s mother and father do not spend their whole time in bomb shelters. They only go in them when there’s a raid. My sister is not a nurse — she is in fact in charge of a mobile canteen. I never saw anything that looked like a U boat — or anything remotely hostile while crossing the Atlantic and I’ve only been in the Navy for three months.” “So what, Mac? ... You’ve been to the movies ain’t yer? ... What the hell! As long as they buy War Bonds!”

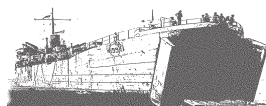
It was impressive. In the centre of New York’s Time Square stood a Japanese two man submarine, captured but a short time ago at Pearl Harbour. Along the full length of it was a staging with a centre dais standing twelve foot high from the ground. Facing me was a battery of microphones and behind them a huge mass of people, who had already been ‘warmed up’ just waiting to hear from a young British Royal Navy Sailor, just why they had all “gotta make a big effort to buy *Big, Big, Big* with more bonds for our fighting boys”.

I started with mother and father in the bomb shelters and when I felt a tear trickle down my cheek I considered it was time to move on to my sister, who was by now nursing the wounded (after driving her mobile canteen around the gun sites). Having but a couple of weeks ago seen at the cinema, Noel Coward’s wonderful portrayal of a destroyer captain in the film ‘In Which We Serve’, I had ample material for my crossing of the Atlantic. By now I had really warmed to my theme, but I had also become conscious of a gentle but firm prodding in the small of my back, accompanied by a hoarse stage whisper saying “Sock ‘em, Mac, Sock ‘em, NOW!”

Sock them I did. I turned dramatically and pointed to the submarine.. “You have before you evidence to the lengths that the enemies of your country and mine will go to, to obtain world domination. Mothers, fathers, sisters, wives and sweethearts ... Give us the materials and we will give them HELL!”

“That was great, Mac ... I knew it was a success when you had them reaching for their wallets when your sister was gently lifting that wounded gunner to give him some tea!”

It was a success ... How many War Bonds it sold, I do not know.



We left Asbury Park, New Jersey, at the end of February 1943 It was bitterly cold, following heavy falls of snow.

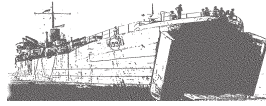
We had been issued with heavy Arctic clothing which was put to good use, but as we got aboard the train there was some speculation as to our destination, for we had also been issued with tropical kit including a pith helmet. Bets were taken as to whether we were to head north or south, but interest waned as we spent many hours being shunted around various marshalling yards.

Five days later, we arrived at New Orleans and dressed in our tropical whites marched down Canal Street to

await transport across the Mississippi, which would take us to the ship that was to be my home for the next three years.

She was like no other ship I had ever seen. Long, wide and standing high out of the water. The armament consisted of six Oerlikon anti-aircraft guns and one twelve pounder.

On her wide bows, which were in fact hinged doors concealing a ramp door which could be raised or lowered, was painted LST 199.



### **Stern Propeller Gland Grease Pump**

The main engine room of an LST was a noisy place to say the least. When underway, it was absolutely impossible to make yourself heard. The only way to pass messages was to write little notes. How I wish I had kept some of those notes!

No form of ear protection was used other than cotton wool plugs. It is no wonder, that our hearing is so bad in later life.

When the main engines were started, it required just two men to be on watch. The same was so when the ship was on passage and it was only when the ship went to 'action stations', that both engine rooms, auxiliary and main were 'double banked' ... meaning there would be four in the main and two in the auxiliary room.

A leading motor mechanic was in charge of the main engine room and had with him a stoker. 'Stoker' is a misleading title, for it gives the impression of a rating, possibly stripped to the waist, sweating profusely and shovelling coal into a boiler furnace. Stokers in LSTs — other than the active service ratings — had no training at all in steam. They were trained essentially to be able to keep a watch in a diesel driven ship. Their job in an LST, when on watch, was to constantly move around the engine room noting the different oil and water temperatures and pressure. These periodically had to be entered in the engine room log.

Another job was to answer every engine room telegraph movement and enter it into a log. This often was a full time occupation — when entering a harbour which was littered with sunken ships — or berthing onto a 'hard' in a congested area — or just coming alongside in bad weather.

The cleanliness of the engine room was also the Stoker's responsibility. The telegraphs having special attention. I do not remember the telegraphs in LST 199 ever being dull — the engines shone as did all the brightwork and engine room plates. Periodically during a watch, the stoker was required to leave the engine room via the engine room trunking and make his way aft to the shaft alley trunking, descend into the shaft alley three decks down, and in the first compartment check the 'plummer block' or shaft bearings, taking particular notice that they were not running hot — then open the water tight door — shut it tight behind you again — go into the after compartment and check the bearings there. Right aft was situated the grease pump which was necessary to force grease into the stern tube, housing the propeller shaft. It required ten pumps with the foot to complete the operation. If the ship was on an easy and quiet passage, this diversion from the normal round of engine room duties was very welcome. It meant that you could be free of the engine room routine for a matter of ten minutes or so — have a quiet smoke and a chat — maybe grab a cup of tea if you worked it right as you passed through one of the mess decks. But, as so often happened, particularly during operations in the Mediterranean, sea passages were not quiet — quite a lot went on. If the Germans were not active in their efforts to sink ships, they were so often responsible for alarming reports brought straight down to the mess decks from the flag deck.



Tom Watt, our leading bunting tosser (signalman) always made these sound dramatic in his very cheerful sort of way — putting special emphasis upon reports of at least two German U boats known to be in the area. This news was never received enthusiastically in the stokers' mess — particularly if you were due to go on watch in a short time — nor were reports of intensive mining having been carried out in the area that the LSTs were passing through.

When these conditions existed, a special routine was adapted for the inspection of the shaft alleys.

Permission was asked of the motor mechanic to leave the engine room — then a leisurely ascent up the engine room trunking ladder to the starboard troop space — then through the water tight door of that compartment to the starboard shaft alley door. The six 'dogs' were undone and a position taken up on the rungs of the shaft alley trunking ladder — the door was then closed and the six dogs returned ... At this point, the normal leisurely inspection procedure changed dramatically ... The feet hardly touched the rungs of the ladder as the descent of three decks down was made. Once in the first compartment of the shaft alley, the shaft bearings were quickly felt by hand and oil levels checked.

In double-quick time, the 'dogs' of the water tight door of the next compartment were knocked off and the door closed ... Once inside and the 'dogs' returned, these shaft bearings were quickly checked and the grease pump given ten quick but thorough pumps. The door 'dogs' knocked off, the door closed and 'dogs' returned, a double-quick exit was made back up the shaft alley trunking ... This was repeated on the starboard shaft alley ... The time of inspection was easily halved ... then a leisurely return was made via the compartment holding the American K rations. A few pleasantries passed with the American guard usually produced a can of peaches which were shared with the watchmate.

It is ironic to note that when LST 199 was finally mined off Surabaya the impact of the explosion was in the starboard shaft alley, just shortly after such an inspection had been made.

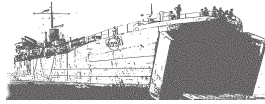
### **The Day the Skipper Got His Own Back**

In the auxiliary engine room are housed all the pumps ... ballast pumps, bilge pumps, and fire, main pumps etc. The fire main pump not only pumped salt water round the ship's fire main system, it also served the important function of flushing the toilets — or 'heads' as they are known in the Royal Navy. There were quite a lot of them for not only did they need to satisfy the needs of the ship's company and officers, but also the needs of the hundreds of troops, which the LSTs carried. The normal fire main pressure was maintained at 80lb per square inch, but the first duty of the auxiliary engine room stoker when 'action stations' sounded, was to raise the fire main pressure to 120lb per square inch and keep it at that until the 'All Clear' or 'Stand Down' was sounded. Then, and only then, was the pressure lowered again to 80lb per square inch and it was the first duty of the stoker on watch to do this.

We were on convoy sometime in June 1943 on our way to Malta, out of Tripoli. We had gone to 'action stations' on several occasions due to heavy air activity. I was on my own in the auxiliary engine room doing the last dog watch 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. The action station bells went just after I took over the watch. The 'dogs' went on the water tight doors throughout the entire ship and I was left in no doubt that I was batted down on my own. I raised the fire main pressure from 80 to 120 and carried on my duties — The main one being standing by the main switchboard — for a 'near miss' had the habit of knocking the electricity 'off the board'.

I remember it as being a rather unpleasant three hours, for I could not be relieved. 'Standby' must have been for all that time. At last 'stand down' sounded and my only thought was for my relief. As soon as he arrived, I was up the engine room ladder, but as soon as I stepped through the door at the top, the E.R.A. grabbed me and said "Get your cap, Lofty, you're for it this time The skipper's got his own back!" "What do you mean?" I said. He laughed and said "You'll find out." Everyone else thought it funny and as I was escorted up the steps to Wardroom flat I got a loud cheer.

The skipper was always known for his immaculate 'whites' — whether on or off the bridge. Unfortunately, for me, he had come straight from the bridge to his cabin urgently needing the toilet. After using it, had leant over the pan, pushed the handle and received back in his lap his complete bowel evacuation at 120lbs per square inch. He stood there, completely smothered, looking as if he was due for a heart attack at any moment. I couldn't help it — I just couldn't stifle the laughter which cost me a five minute dressing- down and fourteen days extra duties ...



## PORTS VISITED BY LST 199

### U.S.A.

New Orleans  
Hoboken, New Jersey.  
New York

Commissioned ship

Left for Med

### North Africa.

Casablanca  
Oran  
Bougie  
Bizerta  
Philipville  
Sousse  
Safx  
Tripoli

### Malta

Grand Harbour

### Sardinia

Cagliari

### Corsica

Ajazio

### Sicily

Cape Passero  
Augusta  
Catania  
Palermo  
Messina

Landing Syracuse

Loaded for Salerno

### Italy

Reggio  
Tarranto  
Castellammare  
Naples  
Salerno  
Bagnoli  
Nettunia  
Anzio

Landing

Landing

Landing

Landing

### Great Britain

Swansea  
Southampton  
Stokes Bay (Gosport)  
Dover  
King George V Dock, London

Loaded for Normandy — 16 trips to Normandy

Re-loaded for Normandy

Took on ammunition and fuel

Loaded for Normandy

Wallsend Slipway, Newcastle  
Lamlosh Isle of Arran Liverpool

Refit for Far East  
Loaded LCT for Far East

### France

Juno Beach — Landing  
Sword Beach  
Arromanches

### Egypt

Port Said  
Port Suez  
Port Taufiq

### Southern Yemen

Aden

### India

Cochin

+ return visit for two weeks leave up in the hills, at Ootucamund,  
Wellington Barracks

Madras

Vishakhapatnam

A fuelling station, and nothing else. (It was here that we heard of  
Japan's surrender, on a return visit.)

Calcutta

Chittagong

Cox's Bazar — Landing

### Burma

Akyab

Ramree Island

Rangoon

Landing

Landing (It was here we heard of victory in Europe.)

### Malaya

Port Swettenham

Singapore

Landing

Arrived for the Surrender

### Sumatra

Pandjang

Took the surrender of the town from the Japanese

### Java

Surabaja

Taking out women and children from the concentration camps to  
the hospital ships, 1,500 at a time.

It was here that LST 199 sadly finished her days, when she was mined off Surabaja . I am still very proud to have served on her from her commissioning to her final port of call.

In Pandjang, a volunteer shore party called for. We were armed and marched round the town. We arrived in the centre and everything went nicely until someone shot the Union Jack down which was flying over a principal building. After it went quiet again we were entertained for tea in another building and each given a silk scarf as a present. My mother treasured it for years.



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Daily Mail exclusive pictures  
Another in Page THREE.

at Rib, says  
my Daily Mail Reporter

**A** MONG people attend-  
ing yesterday's auc-  
tion sale of the contents of  
the German Embassy in  
London were seven men  
and two women who  
claimed to be members of  
the Christian Reform  
League, formed last Sunday.

Headquarters of the orga-  
nization are at Kingdom  
House, River, near Pet-  
worth.

One of those people, a Mr. J.  
Hattersby, who said he was the  
General Secretary of the  
League, told me: "We have  
come here today to buy the flag  
of Hitler's regime, and we  
do not want to see his flag  
trampled in the dust."  
Hattersby was seen by God in  
break the Mamonos system."

Mr. Hattersby also said that he  
and other members of the League  
had been in favour of a "negotiated  
peace" in 1918, and had  
been imprisoned under Defence  
Regulation 18b.

**Veneration**

"Hitler," he said, "is the  
greatest man of his age, and  
the world's most definitely, in  
the sense that he has broken the  
system which brought misery, war,  
and destitution to millions of  
people."  
Hattersby said that he never  
forgot the day when he saw  
the flag of Hitler, and that it  
was the flag of God on Earth.

Mr. Hattersby told me that the  
man who bought Hitler's bust at  
the sale—Captain R. Gordon  
Canning—was willing that it  
should go down to Kingdom  
House, in Sussex, and that it  
should remain there as an object  
of veneration.

"Speaking for myself," he said,  
"I cannot say that I am a  
patriot, but I am a patriot  
because I am a patriot for  
three years under Regulation 18b with-  
out a charge, being brought  
against me. Blessed are the  
peacemakers, for I am a peacemaker."

I was told in a spirit message  
that the man who bought my  
bust, when I was with my  
brother in prison, was the  
man who bought my bust.  
I was told together. Our move-  
ment was born in prison cells.

**Converts**

"We have only had our head-  
quarters at Kingdom House open  
for a week, and my fellow  
members are making many con-  
verts. Nine out of ten people to  
whom I have spoken are in agree-  
ment with our aims, and all are  
enthusiastic in denouncing the  
British."

Of Hitler's head, bought for  
£100 at yesterday's sale, Mr. Hat-  
tersby said:

"I got having the head removed  
on Wednesday from Earl's Court  
and a plain man in Kingdom House  
expressed people think that I am  
wrong, and it is possible that I am  
wrong. I am not a doctor, and I  
am not a scientist, but I am a  
patriot, and I am a patriot for  
three years under Regulation 18b with-  
out a charge, being brought  
against me. Blessed are the  
peacemakers, for I am a peacemaker."

**Marshall for  
China as  
Hurley quits**

From JOHN HALL  
New York, Tuesday.

MAJOR-GENERAL Patrick  
J. Hurley, U.S. ambas-  
sador to China, has resigned.

He says his work as Ambas-  
sador to Chungking has been  
overshadowed by American over-

**RED CROSS  
SOS TO  
SAVE JAVA  
FAMILIES**

From NOEL MONKS  
Batavia, Tuesday

HELP may be near for the  
women of JAVA, women  
with the perpetual mark of fear  
on their faces. An impassioned  
 appeal for United Nations' assist-

**SECRET of the German battleship**  
the Royal Navy in 1941, is out  
of 35,000 tons, as announced by the  
36,000 tons—largest battleship in the

This was disclosed in a  
document from the German  
naval files produced by the  
prosecution at the Nurem-  
berg trial today.

The files also showed that the  
German Navy started 14 years  
before Hitler came into power its  
preparations for another struggle  
against Britain.

There were three ships in the  
36,000-ton class, called by the Ger-  
mans U-1, U-2 and U-3.

Finished to an extent in the ship-  
yard in which they should be con-  
structed in 1934, they were com-  
pleted in 1935.

We visited twice. First time took troops to take over from Japanese. The second time we visited, we ended up by giving a party to all the Dutch children who had been held in the Japanese concentration camps. A considerable amount of ingenious inventions were thought of, and acted upon, in the way of entertainment.

One was the dismantling of an Oerlikon gun and using its base as a 'round-a-bout'! There was also a wire rigged from the bridge to the forward starboard Oerlikon gun position for use as an overhead wire ride — the most popular form of entertainment as I remember.

The 'electrical people' made up all sorts of games where balls set off lights when hit in the right places. The whole of the ship's company was involved in entertaining.

The three chefs again worked wonders. (We were indeed very fortunate in our cooks.)

The ship was dressed overall with everything going on, on the upper deck when a destroyer entered harbour ... Whether it was because they could not believe their eyes, or whether they, like other ships, accepted that LSTs did things differently from the true Navy Way, I don't know, but there were no formalities such as ensign dipping or piping — just, I suspect looks of absolute incredulity!

## Mess Deck

I have often been asked “what was the thing I missed most” when I left home and went into the Royal Navy. My answer has always been — Privacy.

The lack of it was bad enough in the training depots and barracks, but they were big places and privacy of a sort could always be found, but in a small ship it was non-existent. The Stokers’ Mess in LST 199 was an area of about 14ft. square for eating, sleeping and recreation — for 20 or more lively young men.

To attempt to write a letter at any given time was almost an impossibility, for the table would be crowded with a crib game going well, somebody telling the story of their last run ashore, (in the most lurid and down to earth details), somebody would be coughing their lungs up after lighting a ‘tickler’- there would be sneezing, laughing, belching and ‘breaking wind’ in different degrees of intensity.

“You don’t spell precious like that, Lofty, bloody hell — What school did you go to? — Soapy, look! — He has spelt precious without an ‘E’ on the end.”

“Let’s have a look — What else you spelt wrong?” — So it went on. You either gave up and joined in whatever was going on or you would resolve to finish the letter during the next watch down in the Auxiliary Engine Room, or search solitude in any out-of-the-way places in the ship that you might know of.

One would think that at least there would be complete privacy when performing the natural bodily functions — but no — the toilets were so positioned that two more people would crowd by you to take up their respective positions and carry on a conversation in a perfectly natural way. In front of you just three or four feet away the four wash basins would be in use and also the showers. One thing for sure, nobody had any secrets regarding his body, whether it was blemishes in some form or other or the size of his reproductive organ ... ‘Courting tackle’ was one of the many descriptive names given to it.

The Bunk was a very private place. Although they were three high and the distance between each bunk was only 2ft 6ins, it was a place where you could be alone with your thoughts, your ambitions for the future, the warmth of your girl-friend or wife, so many, many miles away, or your tears when thoughts of loved ones so far away suddenly became so near. This was a kind of privacy that was respected by all — particularly in the Stokers’ Mess deck. It was a place you could leave your letters from home and know that they would not be disturbed, or your special belongings or even your money.

## Rounds

A living space so crowded needed to be kept scrupulously clean and this was the responsibility of the ‘leading hand’ of the mess. (His rank in the army would have been corporal.)

In LSTs. we were indeed very fortunate in having cafeteria messing and excellent cooks, so no food was prepared on the mess decks. It was a very busy area, however, and, without strict discipline as regards cleanliness, could have easily become untenable.

In the Stokers’ Mess nobody was allowed at the table for breakfast unless they had washed and certainly nobody would sit at the table having just come off watch, unless they had showered. In the three years or so that I was aboard LST 199 I can remember only one instance when a stoker would not conform to these rules. No disciplinary action was taken. Within three days of this rating coming aboard the ‘leading hand of the mess’ dealt with the matter in his own way.

With the help of a couple of volunteers the stoker was man-handled into the shower and scrubbed with hard brushes ... He conformed. Fortunately for the whole mess deck his stay with us was not for long.

During the forenoon the mess decks were vacated — only those detailed were allowed to remain — and the whole area was scrubbed out — nothing was allowed out of place. Any spare clothing left lying around was put into the ‘Scran Bag’ and would be auctioned at a later date. The ‘captain of the heads’ (i.e. the rating in charge of the cleanliness of toilets, showers and basins) would have the taps shining and bowls and basins gleaming.

Then the officer of the watch would do his rounds accompanied by the coxswain and quarter master. At each mess the quarter master would blow his ‘pipe’ and call ‘Officers Rounds’. Those present would come to at-

tention, the inspection was carried out and if the officer was not satisfied he would order a 're-scrub'. It would all have to be done again.

At 21.00 it would be Officers' Rounds again, but without quite so much attention to detail. Then 'out pipes' would be piped — meaning no more smoking on the mess decks.

Another pipe called by the quarter master was the one for 'Darken ship', when all 'dead lights' were bolted over the port holes and the ship placed in complete darkness.

Saturday forenoon was reserved for Captain's Rounds, when the captain inspected every part of the ship. This was a good thing for at least he was seen, although a very distant figure.

For the first 18 months, the messing for the entire 'lower deck' was confined to the after section — aft of the tank space. Ninety ratings albeit in their respective messes, lived, slept and ate together in this very congested area, but it was a palace compared to the accommodation provided for those who crewed the L.C.Ts. and L.C.Is.

Just before the Normandy landing, the complement of LST 199 was increased to 120 to replace expected casualties. The stokers were then moved out and took over three troop spaces on the port side and used the toilet and washing facilities designated for troop use. It worked well really, except when carrying troops ... Then, not only was it very congested, but the wash basins and toilets were often blocked with vomit — especially if the weather was bad. After two days of bad weather, the troops usually stayed in their bunks or vehicles, then they and the cleanliness of the troop spaces came under the responsibility of the seamen.

### **Entertainment**

First and foremost was crib — either six carded or five, and always a very serious game, often played for 'sippers' of the rum ration.

Then there was 'Uckers' — the navy name for Ludo — this was also a firm favourite. It would be played once in a while as a knock-out championship involving all the mess decks and wardroom.

The championship would be played off on the upper deck, on a six foot square 'board', (a piece of canvas from the Bo 'sun's store) and the dice would be twelve inch square and shaken in a dustbin.

Such a championship was being played off on November 5th. 1945. Leading Stoker Dixon was shaking the dice in the dustbin. I called, out to him — "Let's have a six, Tiny!" — As the dice hit the deck for a six there was a terrific explosion and the after-end of the ship was wreathed in smoke and the entire ship bounced up and down and then took a very bad list to port. The mine hit in the port shaft alley. — Had not the off duty personnel been watching the championship the mess decks would have been crowded and there certainly would have been a lot of injuries and loss of life.

Coin table football was another game played a lot and also taken seriously. The tank space lent itself admirably to football and deck hockey — here there were injuries, many in fact, but none serious. The fact that any number could play when the game was in session contributed to the number of injuries!

When in harbour, swimming was always popular. The pipe from the quarter master would be "Hands to bathe on the starboard (or port) side." The L.C.A., which was carried in the ship's davits, would be lowered to be used as a rescue craft in case anyone got into difficulties. Then it would be everyone off watch into the water — there would be a good dive or jump of 50 — 40 ft. from the after Oerlikon platform.

One afternoon, the officers were swimming, watched by everyone. One officer was seen to get into difficulties and the cry went up "Throw him a lifebelt!" One was taken from its bracket on the ship rails and thrown directly at the officer in trouble. It hit him fair and square on the head and knocked him unconscious, which raised a rousing cheer from everyone lining the rails!

Sometimes while at anchor, the bow doors would be opened and the ramp lowered, and swimming would take place from there.

In calm weather, while underway at sea, if it was very hot, or if you had just spent four hours on watch in the engine room, there was one place that was used to cool off. I think many people knew of it — and certainly

it was an offence to use it as such when underway. That place was at the base of the void between the bow doors and the ramp doors. The bow doors were not water tight — they were not intended to be.

When closed they simply deflected the waves away from the huge slab that was the ramp door and so gave better movement to the ship through the water. The ramp door was raised and lowered on heavy chains by electric motors. When raised and in the closed position a series of heavy locking devices were activated by hand, squeezing the door on to a seal making it watertight. The bow doors were opened and shut by 'rack and pinion'. This void could only be used for the purpose of 'cooling off' in calm weather or at anchor. The sea flowed through continuously at a depth of about four foot. The surroundings were not pleasant — but it served a purpose.

To gain access, all that was needed was to carry an oil can and a piece of rag with the intention of showing those on the bridge that your journey was really necessary — and then disappear through the hatch situated on the deck.

## **Weather**

Without a doubt LSTs, were excellent ships when performing the duties for which they were designed ... mainly to provide back-up of heavy weaponry and men for the first troops ashore in a landing. Besides these duties they performed many more with equal efficiency. But, because of their design and the need to operate in shallow waters, (to land, in fact, on exposed beaches), they were very uncomfortable in bad weather. They would roll in a beam sea to such an extent that the salt water suction for the engines would come out of the sea, causing loss of cooling water to the fresh water engine cooling plant and ultimately over-heating the engines themselves.

Being completely flat bottomed caused a serious problem, as did the lack of bulkheads in the tank space. In a head sea they would ride up a wave then fall down on the next one, but instead of cutting it they would slam down on it with such force that the whole ship would flex from amidships. In extreme conditions, when not carrying troops, it was necessary to vacate the after crews' quarters and move up into the midship troop accommodation. Through these conditions some LSTs. had serious fractures in the structure amidships.

It was not uncommon in a gale to be doing enough engine revolutions down in the engine room for a speed of 10 knots, only to be just making headway up on deck. If in convoy in such conditions, it was invariably 'every ship for itself', and LSTs. could be seen all over the seascape 'dodging' - which means holding the ship's head up into the wind and taking the seas on the port or starboard bow. The decision to turn and run in front of the weather was taken only when it was considered safe to do so.

When carrying troops these conditions were intolerable. The men would not move from their bunks or from the positions they were in when they just gave up and fell down absolutely exhausted from seasickness.

The other main consideration was for the tank deck and on the upper deck. To look into the tank deck and see the whole mass of vehicles moving with the heavy roll — knowing that it would need only one tank to break adrift to cause complete mayhem — was frightening ... But not so frightening as it was for the seamen who would have to go in there to check on the vehicle fastenings. It says a lot for the discipline, training and expertise of the seamen loading vehicles on to LST 199, that I cannot recall one serious occurrence caused by a tank or other form of transport breaking adrift. I remember one gale of wind in the Mediterranean — the worst for 20 years, (in fact January 1944) when LST 199 in company with other LSTs. of the 4th. flotilla 'dodged' for 48 hours before turning and running for Cagliari in Sardinia.

## **Make and Mend**

After a spell at sea and the welcome order of "Finished with main engines" had been rung down to the engine room, on the wheelhouse telegraphs, the entire ship's company would, if there were no urgent stores to come aboard, hear the Quarter Master pipe 'Hands to make and mend'. Most of the crew would take to their bunks and after a sleep, would go to their lockers and get out a very important item, issued to them when they first joined the Navy.

This was called a 'Housewife' — a length of stout navy blue cloth made up into pockets, which contained needles, cotton, thread, wool, scissors and buttons. It rolled up neatly and was tied with two blue tapes in

the middle. There would be overalls and shirts (white fronts) to patch, buttons to be sewn on and socks to darn.

The method most used for patching clothes was simple and required very little skill. A piece of cloth taken from a well-patched and worn out boiler suit (which had been stowed away to fulfil such a purpose), was cut to the size of a book which was larger than the hole to be repaired. The book was placed inside the garment with the hole in the middle. The cloth was placed on the book and then all that was necessary was to sew neatly round the book. The finished product was a neat square or oblong patch.

Darning needed more skill — if the hole in the sock was large, then it was important to have a 'mushroom'. This was a piece of wood shaped like a mushroom, which was put into the sock and then 'yarns' of wool were sewn across it.

When this was complete, yarns of wool would be woven through these, completing a repair. If the hole was smaller we used a table tennis ball. The most skilful part of sewing on buttons was, I found, threading the needle.

There was no laundry and the washing of clothes, so necessary to personal cleanliness, was done on a day-to-day basis, particularly for the engine room ratings. We of the crew of LST 199 were fortunate that the majority of our service in her was done either in the Mediterranean or the Far East, where the minimum of clothes was necessary.

Buckets were acquired, and guarded, jealously, for they were an important item for 'dhobiing'. Soap was bought from the canteen and the engine room rating could get extra in the form of soft soap. There was no iron in our mess — come to think of it, I never saw one on the ship, so when the garments had been washed and rinsed they would then be shaken out vigorously, smoothed on the bulkhead and then hung to dry in one of the troop spaces.

There were times when water was rationed drastically and the showers would be changed over to salt water only, but the washing of clothes was so necessary for those working in the high temperatures of the engine room, that extra water was allowed to them.

### **Boiler.**

The boiler which provided hot water for all purposes within the ship was fully automatic ... or was, for some of the time. It was the responsibility of the stoker on watch in the main engine room to check it periodically. When it wasn't performing well, the results could be quite alarming. When the pressure in the boiler dropped to a certain level, the ignition and fuel pump were intended to operate together.

Unfortunately, this didn't always happen — fuel would be pumped into the furnace and ignition would take place sometime later, resulting in a loud bang, which would shake the boiler and the stoker and also blow soot from the back plates. In the later stages of its usefulness a stoker kept a full watch on it and operated it manually. He would watch the gauge and when the pressure had dropped to the correct level he would switch on ignition, the motor would start and he would then beat a hasty retreat up the escape hatch into the troop messing space above. There the operator would wait until the minor explosion before going down in the boiler room again!

On one occasion liberty men were fell in on the upper deck waiting for inspection by the officer of the watch, when suddenly the boiler safety valve operated, covering everyone in steam and scalding rusty water. I never heard of a punishment being handed out to the stoker on watch ... Maybe, by then, everyone had got used to its unpredictable behaviour.

### **Watch Keeping**

The twenty four hour clock is used aboard ship. This is split up into periods of time which are called 'watches'. One method is called 24 about, whereby a man will be on duty for 4 hours and then off duty for 4 hours during a whole period of 24hours. After this he will be off watchkeeping duty for a further 24-hours.

The other method which was used continuously on LST 199 is called 3 Watches. This is used so that a rating does not have the same series of hours for all the time he is a watchkeeper. It is considered a fair method, so that the unpopular hours are shared out. For the uninitiated it can seem very confusing, but it was amazing how quickly we got used to the routine.

The whole 24 hours are split up into 4 hour periods and each period given a name:-

|             |             |
|-------------|-------------|
| FORENOON    | 08.00–12.00 |
| AFTERNOON   | 12.00–16.00 |
| DOG WATCHES | 16.00–20.00 |
| FIRST       | 20.00–24.00 |
| MIDDLE      | 24.00–04.00 |
| MORNING     | 04.00–08.00 |

To break the monotony of this pattern of continuous 4 hour periods, throughout the 24 hours the Dog Watch is split into two, ie:-

|            |             |
|------------|-------------|
| FIRST DOG  | 16.00–18.00 |
| SECOND DOG | 18.00–20.00 |

And so a watch keeper's duties are varied — sometimes being on watch for a 2 hour period and sometimes a 4 hour period, sometimes being off duty for four hours, six or eight. The pattern of duties on watch is as follows:-

FORENOON & LAST DOG.

MORNING & FIRST DOG.

MIDDLE & AFTERNOON & FIRST.

Then going back to FORENOON to start the sequence again. They are separate watches red, white and blue, working this routine, and the number of men in a watch is from one to just how many are needed to cover a given situation.

The alternative occupation to watchkeeping was 'day work', and much sought after. It was amazing how little work you could do when in possession of a large piece of rag and an oil can ... and you had all night in your bunk!

The most unpopular watches — for the engine room rating — were the Middle and Afternoon. It was recognised that if anything was going to go wrong it would do so in the Middle watch — from 'Action Stations' to breakdowns. The Afternoon watch was unpopular because anything remotely pleasant happened in the afternoon — for example — 'Make and Mend', 'Hands to bathe' or an extended 'Stand Easy' and of course there was the thought of only 4 hours off duty before going on watch for the FIRST.

### **Payment**

My rate of pay for being a first class stoker was 3/6 a day, which in today's money is 17½ — my weekly wage thus being 24/6 (or £1.22½p.) This was for being on call for duties 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and from this I allowed my mother 7/6 (27½p) per week.

After the first issue of clothing, each rating was expected to maintain his kit from this pittance, which is why so much attention was paid to patching and mending.

Ninety per cent of the ship's company smoked, and we were indeed very fortunate that we were entitled to duty free cigarettes and rolling tobacco. There was very little else that a man could spend his money on aboard ship, for our little canteen stocked very little other than writing paper, envelopes, soap, toothpaste, ink and, very occasionally a bar of chocolate.

Being on an LST we were so very fortunate that we put in a lot of sea time and visited so many places. Normally, ships of the Royal Navy, when operating in the Mediterranean visited only Malta, Alexandria and Gibraltar. The disadvantage to our wanderings was that we seldom had a full payment. We were given what was called a 'casual' payment — just enough for a run ashore, or to restock the locker with cigarettes etc. Periodically, our records would catch up with us and a full payment with back pay would be made.

To draw the payment, the rating's name was called — He approached the pay table, stood to attention in front of the Paymaster seated behind it, removed his cap, held it out, flat top uppermost, and the money was counted out on top of it.

The money was taken off with one hand, the cap replaced with the other, he then about turned and returned to his place.

When they were in the Far East, Chalky White bought a parrot in one of the street markets and it lived with the crew in the Stokers' Mess. It was strictly forbidden to keep any pets of course, but discipline had been much relaxed since the Japanese surrender.

White cotton covers had been issued for caps, and the parrot used to perch on top of Chalky's head — he became very attached to his bird.

Time came for Captain's Round, and Chalky had no time to hide the parrot before the door was flung open and the captain strode in. There was pandemonium in the mess and the parrot panicked — flying straight into the fan on the deck-head. Blood and feathers were scattered all over the captain, and a reluctant mess had to clear all the debris and face another inspection.

Later, a grieving Chalky White took the bedraggled parrot, sewed the body in his white cap cover and deposited him through the porthole, with suitable words from 'Burial at Sea'.  
-Molly Griggs

## Later Years

### The Check Up

I suppose, with my 60<sup>th</sup> birthday just one month and two weeks away, and the fact that three of my friends have died since Christmas, it would be prudent for me to have a full medical check-up. My doctor thought this a good idea also, but unfortunately this cannot be done through the National Health.

"I can do one for you, myself, privately, but it will only be a basic one — no cardiographs or anything like that, I'm afraid — Cost you £20."

"No, if I'm going to have it done I want the full works and nothing less," I said, and so that is how I ended up at the Ultra Modern Private Hospital at Canterbury, called the 'Chaucer', would you believe.

For those of us that think nothing else than National Health, it was quite an experience. On the N.H. everybody, it would seem, gets an appointment time of 10 a.m. or 2 p.m., which means, by the law of averages, that a patient is bound to see his specialist at any time between 10 a.m. and 5 p.m.

Not so the 'Chaucer' — "What time would suit you sir? — 8.30 ?

"You will need to have no food or drink for 12 hours, so a nice early start and then breakfast when we are finished — Oh, I should say around eleven o'clock — would that suit you? — I would suggest Friday? — Yes, Friday will be a good day? — We look forward to seeing you then on Friday."

"Er ... before you hang up, just how much is this going to cost me?" There was a pause — just long enough to suggest that the receptionist was absolutely disgusted that such a sordid question should be asked. "This is a package deal that we do for all of our 'executive' clients and the total cost is £130." Well, of course, I just had to be an 'executive' and said off-handedly that that would be fine, but I must admit I felt quite sick at the thought of spending that much money on 'me' — on the car, yes, but not on 'me'.

I duly arrived on Friday and noticed, as I parked our six year old Mazda, not your average Ford Fiesta, Mini or Vauxhall, but three Rolls Royces, one Daimler and a sprinkling of other 'up-market' cars.

The entrance and hall is tastefully decorated in fawn and brown, the receptionist is also decorated in fawn and brown, and even, to my amazement, so is the tea lady and of course her trolley and cups and saucers.

"Your name, sir?" (Oxford accent) "Mr. Bright Briggs?"

"No, it is not. My name is Mr. Wright Griggs." I found myself saying in a slightly upper end 'North Road' accent.

"Oh, I say, How frightful! — We don't like mistakes."

"No, it could be disastrous for someone in a place like a hospital."

To this I received a rather chilly smile and went into the usual routine of deciding which of the two names was my Christian name.

"Down the hall, please, and Sister will meet you and introduce you to your nurse." The hall, of course, was carpeted in ankle-deep (or so it seemed) carpet, brown of course to match the fawn ceiling, and I was met by a fawn and brown Sister and nurse.

"Ah, Mr. Griggs or is it Mr. Wright? ... Oh, I see, well, Nurse here will be with you throughout the day's proceedings. Anything, but anything you need or don't understand, please speak to her about it."

So it began ... Urine tests, blood tests, hearing tests, breathing tests, eye sight and reflex tests and then — "Please, Mr. Griggs, In here for a short break — don't want to overdo things — coffee or tea, a biscuit or two perhaps and of course you would like the papers — just relax" .

It's difficult at first to relax when I catch sight of myself in the full-length mirror ... fawn dressing gown, long spindly legs with socks and shoes on the end. Pity they were black shoes ... should really have worn the brown ones ...

Coffee arrived on a silver tray in a silver pot, accompanied by milk and sugar also in silver containers. On the tray were just two daily papers — 'The Times' and the 'Sun'. I would have liked to have had a look at the nude on page 3 of the Sun, but of course looked at the paper with disdain and picked up the Times. Just one thing spoiled it — the biscuits were still in a plastic packet.

A cardiograph followed and then a full physical examination. A lengthy examination of all orifices preceded an unpleasant investigation which proved my prostate gland is enlarged. "Nothing to worry about there, Mr. Griggs, reasonably normal in a man of 60! — If it works and doesn't leak, count yourself lucky, what!"

A lengthy discussion with the consultant concluded the morning' events and after changing I was escorted to the front doors and bade a pleasant farewell.

## **The Hearing-Aid Batteries**

I still visit hospital regularly and on one visit Pop (Molly's Dad) asked me to exchange his hearing-aid batteries. I don't know if you have seen them, but they are about the size of an old threepenny bit — there are six of them in a pack, and one can get new ones by simply going to Victoria Hospital and going to a desk which unfortunately happens to be situated in the busiest waiting room in the hospital.

You know how it is when you go into a crowded room — everybody is bored and a new face is greeted with great interest, especially in a crowded hospital waiting room. Even before you get your coat undone and get sat down they're wondering what is wrong with you and what clinic you are going to attend.

On this occasion all conversation seemed to stop and all eyes were focussed on me as I walked up to the desk.

"Can you tell me please — can I exchange hearing-aid batteries here, please?"

A voice from the other side of the room said 'Over here'. I was confused and a little bewildered — I turned,



but couldn't make out from where 'Over here' had come. Seeing this, an assistant turned me round and said in a very loud and clear voice (mouthing each word slowly) "Over there, dear, they will see to you."

I reached the desk — already the woman behind it had a form ready for me to sign. I took my glasses, out of my pocket and for some unexplainable reason put them on upside down. They, of course, straightway fell off my nose, onto the desk and landed on top of the little box containing the batteries, which, in their turn jumped off the desk and scattered all over the floor.

There was a distinct sympathetic sigh — and that's quite a loud noise coming from so many people. The woman with the form said "Never mind, dear, they will pick them up for you. Just write your name here." (all this in a very loud voice — each word very clear) "Yes, dear, where my finger is." The batteries had by now been retrieved by two very enthusiastic children who had found this a much more amusing diversion than reading out of date comics.

"Here are your six old batteries, dear," (again each word loud and very clear) "but you won't get six back, you will only get three because these new ones last TWICE AS LONG." I realised then that this had gone beyond the point of no return and I just had to go along with it and I could not resist saying "I beg your pardon?"

She raised her eyebrows and with great patience repeated each word again. As I made to go, one of the nurses said (loudly of course), "Be careful how you go — the path is slippery out there," and helped me out of the doorway.

At no time did anyone suggest that I put the new batteries in 'my' hearing-aid and so hold a sensible conversation — I stood outside that door and laughed quietly to myself until the tears ran down my face. I was just drying them when an ambulance pulled up, the driver took one look at me and I could see sympathy written all over his face, which started me off all over again.

It's going to be interesting when I go there again — they have just got to remember me!

Some thoughts from a psoriasis sufferer.

We serve my skin specialist with fish — he is a good customer.

I should be prepared for it by now, but each time so far — I'm not. You see, he has this habit of having his entire staff consisting of very young and middle-aged nurses and very young male and female doctors and students standing about him, with me standing entirely nude in the middle.

They all gaze very intently at me and write things down on their clip-boards. One will possibly step forward and peer very closely at a particularly bright red patch and nod knowingly at the others until it begins to dawn on them very slowly that this examination is not going the usual way. Doctor Sharville is not describing the ailment in medical terms, nor is he suggesting possible treatment — he is, in fact, discussing the price of salmon trout — Should I advise the buying of large quantities of cod fillets for his deep-freeze as opposed to whiting ?

I, in the meantime, am feeling somewhat embarrassed. I can stand quite happily in front of any number of medical people and not bother at all — just as long as it is medical, but I just cannot, with any composure, give an abridged version of my lecture on 'Inshore Fishing in the English Channel', standing completely nude surrounded by these, by now, thoroughly un-medical people. This is particularly so when I notice the gaze of a very young face wander down my body to that part which convention normally requires to be covered.

I find my hands flutter from place to place — I'm glad when my 'consultation' is over.

### **Venetian Fete, 1988**

The Venetian Fete was a great success again and this year it was televised. The B.B.C. made a half hour documentary of Hythe as a small town that puts on an 'out of the ordinary' carnival. A number of prominent citizens were interviewed, me being one ... it was great fun.

We had the B.B.C. team round home several times. My connection being, of course, the fishing and its for-

mation way back just after the Romans left, the connection of the fishing with the Cinque Ports, and, of course, the connection myself with the band and its prominent part in the fete.

“I see your interview being opened by you playing your tuba on one of the fishing boats.” — this from the producer.

“Oh no! You’ve got to be joking ... You can interview me as much as you like, but no tuba playing ... that is out.”

But these people are so persuasive aren’t they? ... Or was it my damned ego again. Just fancy me playing my solo to millions instead of the thirty or forty on the Leas — (Mind you that was a disaster — but then I really couldn’t help the music stand falling over ... Then there was that time in Dover — that didn’t go too well either, but then it wasn’t my fault that my music blew away ... ) This of course would be different, nothing would go wrong, and if it did, I would only have to stop and say “Cut it” — or words to that effect, and I could start again.

“Yes, O.K. I’ll do it, but won’t it look strange, me sitting out on the foreshore, blowing my tuba? I mean, I don’t do that sort of thing usually.”

“It’s going to be great- just great — you’ll see.”

How quickly news travels in this town of ours. I arrived on the beach with the film crew — eight of them — and also a fair proportion of Hythe’s population. Very ribald comments were being made by the fishing community. Well, I mean to say, just what would you expect, when one of the film crew says,

“What do you want me to do with your tuba, Mr. Griggs?”

They sat me on top of an upturned boat, perched on a beach bank — the light was measured — camera angles were taken,

I was pushed round to face the sun, I was pushed back to get some shadow, the music stand was too high, the music stand was too low ... the light reflection umbrella blew away, beach stones got into the recording machine ... and I began to get temperamental.

“I’m not going to do this, you know.”

They took not the slightest notice and I got the feeling that all this was normal.

“Right — Stand by — Quiet please — Action.” (They really do say that, you know.) I felt myself entering into the spirit of the thing.

You could hear the seagulls just above the sound of the waves lapping the beach. I started to play — it sounded good — I got half way through the opening passage and wasn’t comfortable, so I shifted my position slightly. To my horror I realised the boat with me sitting on it was slowly, but surely, slipping down the beach bank. They kept filming, but the spectators could contain themselves no longer and fell about laughing.

“Cut — Take 2? Stand by — Quiet please — Action.” This time two little toddlers just walked into camera halfway through, complete with their buckets and spades and commenced to chatter non-stop.

After Take 6, Stand by, Quiet please, Action, I did it right through. I wasn’t pleased with it - my mouth was dry, my backside was sore, (that boat had quite a sharp keel), I was embarrassed with all the comments and I was feeling very drained. So, as I brought my tuba down and laid it in my lap, I looked straight into the camera lens (which was now 2’6” away) and said “I always was a far better fisherman than I ever was a tuba player and that’s for sure.” They like it and it stays in.

### **Holiday Memories, Majorca**

We had arrived at Palma Airport and the idiot who had been sitting beside me breezed by full of the confidence that comes from many package-deal flights.

“Grand flight, don’t you think!”

“Yes,” I said, still feeling dazed and amazed that we had actually landed intact. A good flight I suppose it was, if you like that sort of thing. Personally, I was glad it was all over and I was once again on God’s good earth.

We arrived at Gatwick and entered the air terminal with mixed feelings. This was to be our first fly-away holiday.

Of the seemingly thousands of people milling around, none seemed to show the concern I felt.

Having, in the preceding weeks, closed my mind to the actual fact that I would have to get into an aeroplane to get to our intended destination, I was staggered by the number of desks dealing with outgoing flights to all parts of the world. I suppose I imagined that there would be only one aeroplane and that I would get into it without delay and we would be away into the ‘Great blue yonder.’

This, of course, was not so, the right ‘check-in’ had to be found, bags had to be weighed, passports and flight documents looked at ... it was all too much ... and then suddenly from chaos came order and as if in a dream, I was passed from the reception area into the flight lounge.

Watching the various aircraft taking off made me wonder just how that much aircraft, people and baggage could possibly get off the ground, but it took very little imagination to realise how quickly it could come down.

The Hotel.

I remarked to Molly that the average guests were rather elderly, to which she replied,

“Yes, dear, they are all in their mid-fifties.”

Ah well! — At least my stomach is comparatively flat and I have all my hair.

Opposite us at meal times, occupying a table to herself, was an attractive middle-aged woman ... completely alone she was, no companion ... I remarked to Molly that a story could be written about her — a romantic novel perhaps ...

One morning I decided to have a swim before breakfast. I arrived at the pool and found, draped over a beach chair, a beach robe and towel, and there in the water was this lone woman — not another guest in sight — just us, the sounds of the mountain goat bells and the rustle of the palm trees, stirred by a gentle breeze. The setting was ideal, although the presence of the pool attendant was a little off-putting. It was obvious that he wanted to get on with cleaning his pool and was put out with these two people who had decided to swim when everybody else was still asleep. Molly was still asleep, and so I slipped off my bath robe, self-consciously flexed my muscles and drew my stomach muscles in at the same time, hoping that my shorts would not fall down.

I quickly thought back over the thirty-odd years for the standard romantic line of approach. Although having laid dormant for so long, it soon came through and, timing the position just right, I dived in to surface just beside her.

We swam four lengths together and, as she left the pool, I felt flattered and considered I had done rather well. I slipped on my robe and sauntered back to our room, wondering if I should tell Molly ... or not. I went into the bathroom to shower and as I was drying myself I felt that something was not quite right, and then, with horror, I realised what was wrong, for there on the shelf above the wash basin was the glass containing my teeth.

“No, my God! My teeth!”

“What’s that, dear?”

“My teeth! — I forgot to put my teeth in — I’ve been swimming without my teeth!”

“Never mind, dear, nobody would have noticed this time of morning.

## The Queen Mother

*When the band first played in St. James' Park in 1983, Son wrote to the Queen Mother in her capacity as Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports at that time. ( He did think that as Clarence House was very near to St. James' Park, she might even open her windows to listen to the band? )*

*He had a lovely letter back from her lady in waiting to say that, unfortunately, the Queen Mother was in Scotland, but was pleased to hear about the band and wished them well. -Molly Griggs.*

It was July and summer had arrived — or so we thought — and it was an ideal setting. Walmer Castle was basking in the late afternoon sunshine and as I looked out across the moat to the gardens beyond, I found it difficult to really appreciate the reason for my being here ...

It had all started some weeks before. We were having our evening meal in the kitchen and the phone rings. I have a sure way of keeping a phone conversation short during meal times. Just before I pick up the phone I stuff my mouth full of food — this, of course, embarrasses the person on the other end and an apology is always forthcoming ... Just room for a potato ...

“Hello, this is Son Griggs.”

It obviously did not sound a bit like that to the caller — more like somebody needing drastic speech therapy.

“Mr. Griggs?”

“Speaking.” Silence.

“Excuse me, would I be speaking to Mr Griggs, chairman of Hythe Town Military Band?”

“Yes, that’s me.” (On, no — not another garden fete needing a band on the cheap.)

“This is Clarence House.” Pause. (So it’s another Nursing Home — Can’t recall this one though.)

“Yes, what can I do for you?” I was running short of potato and my evening meal was getting cold.

“I have to inform you that Her Majesty the Queen Mother has asked that the Hythe Town Military Band perform for her at a private function at her Royal Residence, which is Walmer Castle, at a date to be given later — Are you there Mr. Griggs? — Mr.Griggs? — Mr Griggs?”

(I just could not answer — that damned last piece of potato had got jammed half-way down. I must have sounded a complete idiot and just managed to stop myself saying, “Oh, that Clarence House!”)

“If you can fulfil this engagement, then further details and instructions will follow later. This is classified information and you will discuss it with no-one.”

“Yes, of course. I feel I can say ‘yes’ to your request and consider it a great honour.”

A further phone call followed and arrangements were made for my visit to the castle. I did wonder ... should I wear my dark blue suit? ... It’s getting a bit tight ... I decided against it and settled for brown trousers, light fawn jacket and brown tie. “Excuse me ... this meeting that I am attending this afternoon, is it very formal?”

“Formal, sir?” — That’s part of their training — the way to keep on top of any situation and stall for time — golden rule, always answer a question with a question.

“Yes, formal.” (You are not at all important and you will not get on top of me, mate!)

“Well, yes, in the manner of dress.” His eyes flicked again over my brown trousers and fawn jacket — complete with my brown tie.

“Yes, one could say so, sir. Sir Alistair is wearing a business suit and the Brigadier is ... Oh, we can go in now — this way please.”

We went into that room — I made sure that I was in front — “May I present Sir Alastair Aird, and this is —”

“I am Son Griggs, chairman of the Hythe Town Military Band. Good afternoon, Sir, Good afternoon gentlemen. Now what can I do for you?”

Everybody was most helpful — no snobbery at all. My note taking was a bit of a disaster. Have you noticed that when you are writing down particulars about someone, that someone always looks closely at what you are writing? My spelling is far from good, so to cover up my feelings of inferiority towards this subject, I tend to scribble. This confuses them, but also has an unfortunate spin-off — I can't understand a darn word I have written! However, it all 'jelled' eventually and here we were setting up the band outside the dining room at Walmer Castle, where the Queen Mother had asked us to be, so that we were part of her evening.

We were not quite ready when suddenly two corgis raced through the band — it was too good to be true — and there, standing by the band master was the Queen Mother with a huge smile on her face, enjoying the joke. That set the pattern for the evening which was entirely informal — it was obvious to us all that she was out to enjoy herself relaxing with her guests. The Queen Mother mingled with the band on two occasions through the evening, spending a considerable amount of time meeting members and taking a particular interest in our younger musicians.

It was a memorable evening that will remain with us, 'crowned' by the arrival, three days later, of a beautiful, signed and dated photograph of the Queen Mother.

*Thus started the tradition of the Hythe band playing for the Lord Warden at Walmer Castle ever since...*

### **Etaples, 1982**

In 1982 I retired from being a professional fisherman for 40 years involving me in leaving my warm wife and warm bed at all unearthly hours of the night. I vowed on the day of my retirement that never again would I leave my warm wife and my warm bed before the civilised time 7.30 am.

But on the 11<sup>th</sup> November at 4am the alarm had woken me and I sat on the edge of the bed thinking to myself "I don't really need this ..."

The reason for this early intrusion of my slumbers was because I was to meet Chris (our superintendent) outside our house at 4.30 am and make our way to the Red Lion Square in Hythe — there to meet 24 other people who would be waiting for the coach which was to take us to France, to participate in two Remembrance Services- one at Etaples and the other at Berck-sur-Mer.

What better way is there to cross the Channel, than arriving at Dover, getting off the coach on to the ferry and climbing the stairs to the comforting smell of a full English breakfast being prepared — the pleasant 30 minutes or so enjoying that full English Breakfast and your friends conversation — then a tour around the upper decks with Calais already in sight, the prospect of docking soon and a trouble-free run to the destination of your choice. I have experienced this so many times — but today was going to be different — we were going by tunnel.

We arrived at Cheriton, put on the train, the compartment we were in was then closed and we knew we were moving for there was a slight sensation of doing so. In no time at all a message stating that we were halfway across was flashed up on the wall of our compartment. After a further 30 minutes we were looking out of the windows as we were being driven through the French countryside, having experienced nothing, and the feeling of "Is that it?" accompanied, also, by a longing for the full English breakfast.

It was a moving experience to stand by the war memorial at Etaples and look out upon the thousands and thousands of headstones, each marking a young life given for us all in the two World Wars, so that we, our children and our grandchildren could live in freedom, peace and security. Also to be aware of 'But for the grace of God go I'.

I was privileged to take a part in that short service, taken so sincerely by Chris, by saying the Kohima epitaph and laying a wreath of poppies. We moved on to Berck-sur-Mer for the service there, commemorating the death of so many French men and women — a large amount of them — sadly civilians. I was honoured to be presented with the sword with which I was to rekindle the eternal flame — a very moving experience entailing stepping forward with an ex-service Frenchman of my own age on either side, to touch the button, which in turn, rekindled the flame.

After a reception in the Town Hall, and a very large meal, we made our way back to Calais.

We all had our thoughts about our day in France, but we didn't seem to discuss them. Some, no doubt, had thoughts similar to mine, remembering those we went to school with, but, unlike me, 'never made it home'. Some were too young and no doubt wondered "Why?"

### **How I Became a Tuba Player**

I joined our band in 1962 purely to have another interest with my son, who was then 9 years old and player-learner at that time.

Also my interest was stimulated as my wife and I and his young sister watched him with pride as he participated in his first march.

"But what to play?" was my first thought. I had always fancied a trombone, but thinking ahead and realising my home practice time would be very limited because of my occupation as a fisherman, I felt I really ought to go for a much smaller instrument ... one that would adapt to being played in the wheelhouse of my fishing boat.



So I became a cornetist and took my cornet to sea with me at least three times a week. My crew became very disgruntled about this because the wheelhouse is the 'social' point of any fishing boat and they, seemingly, had no dormant musical talents that needed stimulating.

I was getting along very well with my cornet, if not with my crew, when IT happened. The weather was deteriorating and I had just one part of a simple exercise to get right. I shouldn't have taken the cornet from its case — I shouldn't have put it to my lips, for at that moment the boat gave an unexpected lurch and I pitched forward, hitting the compass binnacle with the instrument, cutting my lip and loosening my four front teeth. My days as a cornet player were finished.

So I then took up the tuba — the mouth piece is much bigger. It's a wonderful instrument and gives me great pleasure. True, it doesn't fit in a wheelhouse, but then neither do I for I have been retired for twelve years now and enjoy every minute of my free time.

### **Never End a ...**

When I was at school, I had to write out 500 times, "Never end a sentence with a preposition."

Today, I heard even the Minister of Education say "... where the money is coming from ..." and our news-readers too — Where do they come from?

What are they paid for?

What are they thinking of?

Don't they realise what the rules were designed for? Just think of all those hours of grammar I went through ...

What is the world coming to?

## To and Fro

I have been having a problem with my right hip, as I have with my neck. I gave up swimming for a while, because I read that breast stroke, (which I use all the time — because of my back) is bad for arthritis in the neck. So, I took to walking a lot, which has brought on a pain in my hip. So, I have taken up swimming again and my hip is much better, but my neck is now most uncomfortable. I was advised that if this form of exercise causes pain, “Don’t swim or walk a lot” — it’s as simple as that. So I didn’t and became constipated. I was advised a diet of bran cereal and ‘Fibogel’. I now get my exercise by running to and fro to the toilet. I am now in a situation of severe stress, for I dare not go out without familiarising myself with toilet access on any proposed route. My neck, back and hip are much better, and I think I’ll take up swimming again ...

## Armistice Sunday.

I have always had this ‘Walter Mitty’ image — this ability to slot myself into any imagined situation. So many times I have sat in our church in Hythe and wondered if the minister or local preacher didn’t turn up, would I be asked to take the service? What a wonderful experience that would be — up there — standing in that beautiful hand-crafted pulpit. But then, either one or the other of them would always appear on time, and my dream would be ended ...

It was 10.15pm on November 10<sup>th</sup> and I was just getting ready for bed, for I must be up and wide awake at 4.15am on November 11<sup>th</sup> to catch the coach in Military Road at 5am. This would take us all to France for a Remembrance Service at Etaples and then on to Berk-sur-Mer for another three short services.

Suddenly the phone rang. “Son, this is Derek Hancock. Son, I have a problem. I am due to take the service at Etaples tomorrow and I have just realised I haven’t got my passport back. I cannot go.”

“Have you made alternative arrangements?”

“Yes, I have.” (Derek can be so very positive.) “I have arranged with the secretary of the Twinning Association that you will conduct the service — Son — are you still there?”

“Er, yes”

“Will that be alright?” The adrenalin has just begun to flow.

“Why yes, of course, Derek. There is no problem. Goodnight.”

It is now 10.45pm. The phone rings again.

“Son, this is Ken Howell. Are you O.K. for taking the service tomorrow?”

“Ken, you have nothing to worry about. I’m in charge and have the situation under control.”

I got into bed at 11pm and would normally have been asleep within minutes. Now, suddenly, I have so much going through my mind. I looked at the clock and saw it was midnight ... I must have some sleep ... it’s going to be a long day. So I took a sleeping pill — shouldn’t have done that, for it was to set up a chain reaction of events which were going to cause me some considerable embarrassment.

“Son, Son. The phone!”

I dragged myself out of bed. It’s a cordless phone and I could not find it. It’s pitch black and although we have lived in this bungalow for 14 months, I cannot find the light switch.

Molly, leapt out of bed and in her super-efficient way switched on the light and rescued the phone — putting it into my hand.

I managed to mumble a slurred “Hello.”

“Son, Are you alright? This is Ken Howell. Where are you?”

“I’m standing beside our bed. Why?”

“Son. You should have been at the bus stop in Military Road at 5am.

It is now 5.35. We have the train to catch ... Please hurry ... We are waiting by the Light Railway Station.”

I couldn't have slept through the alarm ... I never have ...

I grabbed my underwear, a shirt, my blazer, stuffed a tie in the pocket ... Molly helped me put on my socks and shoes ... I kissed her quickly (saying goodbye at the same time, saving precious seconds), grabbed my brief case and ran out of the front door.

I made the coach. I was out of breath and disorientated. I mumbled my apologies to everyone and collapsed on my seat.

After 5 minutes or so I decided to put on my tie. I found this a very difficult operation and rubbed my hand over my face in sheer desperation. I had not shaved. If I hadn't shaved — had I cleaned my teeth? I explored with my tongue and realised, sadly, that they must still be smiling in the glass in the bathroom cabinet.

The coach had now reached the Channel Tunnel. Thank goodness we were on time.

I began to relax. Several people came up to me as we were going through the Tunnel. They were most kind with their remarks, but I could see the concern in their eyes — They doubted my ability to take our short service.

We came out of the Tunnel and were moving down the motorway. I was feeling composed by now — nothing more could go wrong. It was quiet and just the time to go through my notes. I opened my brief case — yes, there were my notes thank goodness, but where are my glasses?

Oh, my God! They must still be on the bedside table ... I cannot manage without my glasses ... Do I cry or do I just carry on hyperventilating? Bob Redding, our trumpeter, came and sat beside me. Dear Bob, he was so comforting ... he offered me his glasses ... they were bifocals ... I could see to read my notes. After wearing them for 20 minutes to really get used to them, he said “Can I have my glasses back?”

“I'm afraid not, Bob, You won't need them to play 'he Last Post' and 'Reveille' —not a man with your expertise.”

He just smiled, a hurt smile, but a smile all the same.

Ten minutes to go and we will be there.

“Excuse me, Bob, I need to use the toilet.”

Nothing more could go wrong. It was not possible.

A coach toilet is a very cramped place and I was having some considerable difficulty, and then realised, with some concern, that I had my Y fronts back to front. It answered the question that I had been asking myself ‘Why am I so uncomfortable?’ After a struggle I managed to put this right, and I felt the coach slow down. We were there.

It is only a short walk through the open gates at Etaples, out to the Cenotaph, but each time I have done this walk I have experienced a feeling of complete peace — this time more so than ever.

I stood on the third step on the Cenotaph, I bowed my head and asked God for help in what I was about to undertake. I received that help, for when I lifted my head, feeling fully composed, I took in the scene before me. The standard bearers were in position, everybody from the coach was standing quietly waiting and Bob Redding, the trumpeter, was standing calmly on my left. I said exactly just how I felt, that this was a humbling experience for me and that I was standing there — not amongst them — but standing in front of them. I was looking over their heads at the evidence spread out on such a vast scale — the reason why we were gathered here on this November morning. Many strong friendships were made by those of us who served in the Forces during 1939-1945. They were formed out of complete trust in each other during the many difficult times.

Sadly, many of these friendships did not reach the end of the World War.

“Although we are to share the two minutes silence in a short time ahead, can we now bow our heads and



take this opportunity to give our thoughts to those friends and loved ones that we have lost.”

The trumpeter started to play the ‘Last Post’, the standards were slowly lowered, and then there was complete silence until the ‘Reveille’ was played. The exhortations were pronounced, the wreaths laid and then, without a word being said, everybody turned to watch the standards being paraded between the rows of headstones. It was a short service but so very sincere.

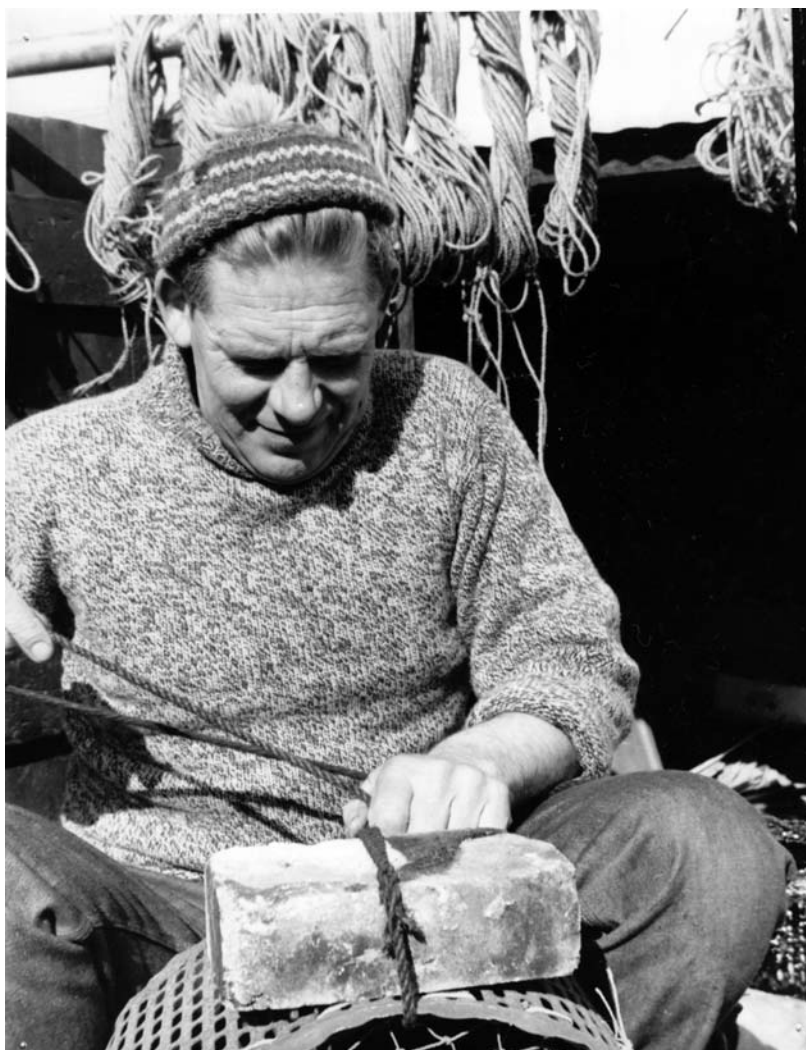
I will never forget the privilege of taking that service.

If I go to France without Molly, I carry a note, written in French, to tell those concerned that I am allergic to garlic.

This note I put in the top pocket of my blazer along with all the other notes for the service — the blessing, the Lord’s Prayer etc.

After the short service at Berk, we made our way back to the coach, which was to take us all to the luncheon. It was as usual, impressive. Fish, meats and vegetables were laid out in plenty. When the waitress came to our table, I was very concerned about my garlic problem, so I handed her the note. She looked at it, she frowned, she showed it to another waitress who also frowned and took it to the kitchen. Everyone was getting restless. What was happening? The first waitress came back to me, still bearing the note — I couldn’t understand a word she was talking about. So I held out my hand for the note - I’ll soon sort this out with the help of an interpreter. But as soon as I unfolded it, I could not believe it as I read “May the love of God, and the fellowship ...”

That must be the end of it — it was after all such a small sleeping pill.



## Postscript from Molly

One event on D Day Son never got around to writing about, but was well known in the family.

June 6. 1944

LST 199 was due to land on Juno beach, but a gun emplacement on the beach was preventing a landing. A cruiser came up from behind and put a shell right through the hole, effectively stopping the firing, and the LST was able to move forward. Unfortunately, due to the extra time involved, after discharging its load of troops and vehicles, the LST was grounded as the tide went out. The captain then ordered all the crew ashore to move off the sand dunes and into the town of Courselles, which was ostensibly in British hands.

“Find a hole and return when the tide is on the turn” were their orders! LST 199 was, of course, a sitting duck — not being able to move, and vulnerable to air attack.

Son recalls running off the beach and into the outskirts of the town. They did find a shell hole and didn't go too far into the town, as they could still hear sporadic firing.

He well remembers seeing some women filling bottles with water at a standpipe (pump?) and marvelling at their composure while all was going on around them.

Fast forward to 1965, when we as a family were camping in Normandy. Seeing a sign for Courselles, Son said, “That's where I landed in 1944 ... let's go and see if there's anything I can remember.”

We parked in the town and walked to the sand dunes. As we rounded the corner Son stopped short.

“My God!” He exclaimed. “It's still there!” ... and there was the damaged gun emplacement! Son was visibly much shaken. We took a photo.



Years later — 1989 and Phil and Ann were holidaying in Normandy. They made a special visit to Courselles, to show the grand-children where “Granddad landed in 1944” ... and the gun emplacement was still there.



Ten years later Son and I visited the area again with two good friends. We were amazed to find the emplacement still there. Another photo ... and Son was moved to tears.

