



# Submariners Times

## January-March 2010



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## Secretary's Locker

Hello Sailor,

How's it going? After the recent snowstorms that hit us and brought the entire country to a grinding halt, you can all relax now and put those snow-shovels and bags of rock salt away. I know some areas had it pretty bad, but how come places that only suffered a few inches of the white stuff had their public transport services stopped, schools closed down, with general chaos prevailing on the roads? What was that all about then? I shudder to think what might happen if we lived somewhere like Siberia or Alaska where it really does snow.

As always, I trust that this edition finds you keeping well and active and that all those who have not been feeling too chipper of late will get well soon. Once again I have the sad duty to inform you of two WWII submariners who have taken their last dives. **Bill (Ginger) Holt** passed away on Christmas Day last year after a long bout with cancer. **John Stewart**, yet another stalwart of our branch for many years, crossed the bar on the 30<sup>th</sup> of January with a similar condition. Both of these diehards remained pro-active and alert right up to the end, never giving in to their sufferings for one minute. These men are an example to us all by their displays of true grit and tenacity in the face of fatal adversity. They leave a big gap in our ranks and will be sorely missed by us all at Merseyside branch – **Resurgam**

In the pages of this edition you will find news of some interesting social events that I hope you will take full advantage of by supporting your local branch. I know it goes with the territory, but your committee put in a lot of hard work on your behalf arranging these events and it is always good to see a positive response for their efforts. The drips three years ago were that not enough went on socially. Things have been much improved since then and you are getting what was asked for. It's time to shake off those winter blues by getting your self involved, and having a good time, okay?

The SA NMA is in the process of creating a new data base of membership details. At present only Branch Secretaries have access to this personal information, but does need to be expanded so that the National Secretary, Jim McMasters, and Membership Secretary, Tex Golding, can also access it. Now before I compile the required information I need to know from you if you are happy with this arrangement regarding your own personal contact details. If I don't hear from you by 22<sup>nd</sup> March I will assume that you are agreeable. If I hear to the contrary, then your privacy rights under the Data Protection Act will be respected. Welcome aboard to two new members over the past month, **Ray 'Jumper' Cross** and **Michael 'Rattler' Morgan**. We look forward to meeting up with you both in the not too distant future. Sincere thanks to those who recently made donations to the branch. Going deep now and I see you all in the next edition.

**Yours Aye**

**Pedro**

**Front Cover: HMS/M Onyx on display at Historic Warships in Birkenhead 2005**

## HMS/M Seraph – Under Two Flags and a Cloak of Secrecy



The *Seraph* was a standard S-Class submarine built in Barrow and commissioned in 1942 under the command of Lieutenant N.L.A. Jewell RN, somewhat irreverently known to submariners as "Jimmy" Jewell, being nicknamed after a popular war-time comedian. A distinguished naval career was to earn him the DSC and MBE. *Seraph* did her working-up trials in home waters before carrying out a 14-day patrol off Norway in July 1942. In August, en-route to the Mediterranean, she was attacked off Cape Finisterre and bombed in error by an RAF Whitley, but she was not damaged and proceeded to Gibraltar where she began special operations, training with a team of Royal Marine Commandos. Her cloak-and-dagger operations were about to begin.

During the early autumn she and other submarines of the 8<sup>th</sup> Flotilla reconnoitred the beaches and landing places for the Allied invasion of North Africa. *Seraph* was deployed to secretly land General Mark Clark and other senior US officers on the North African coast west of Algiers. They made contact with French Generals and after receiving assurances of their co-operation when Allied landings took place, they re-embarked on *Seraph* and were returned to Gibraltar. Almost immediately *Seraph* was off on another mission to recover the French General Giraud and his staff from the French coast at Toulon. Because Giraud adamantly refused to negotiate with the British, *Seraph* was nominally put under the command of Capt. Wright USN, as the *USS Seraph*, with Lt. Jewell in full overall command. The Stars and Stripes were flown, and the British crew members eagerly and convincingly hammed it up as American sailors to complete the deception on that successful mission.

After ramming a U-Boat whilst dived, *Seraph* returned to the UK for repairs. Upon completion she sailed from home with a corpse, "The Man Who Never Was," aboard for another secret mission called "Operation Mincemeat." This was the body of an unknown person who was dressed as a Royal Marine officer, carrying papers that indicated (not too obviously) that the Allies would land in Sardinia and not Sicily. The body was discharged off the Spanish coast at Huelva where it was found and German agents soon obtained and sent the 'secret' information on to Berlin. This clever ploy was believed as genuine by German High Command, and as a result, substantial German forces were re-deployed, making the Allied operation a total success.

Returning to operational duties, *Seraph* took part in the invasion of Sicily, acting as a guide and beacon for the invading US forces. For this and in recognition of previous services to the US, Lt. Jewell was awarded the Legion of Merit by instigation of General Eisenhower. When eventually scrapped in 1962 her periscopes, torpedo rails and ship's bell were used in a Seraph monument built at The Citadel, Charleston, South Carolina, to recognise Anglo-American WWII cooperation (see above). This being the only place in the United States where the White Ensign is permitted to be flown. (Thanks to one of our members, **Bill Wright**, for this story.)

## Diesel Dinosaurs Corner



### The Ping Bosun's Log

by Mick Jones

Dear Friends & Shipmates,

Here we are well into a brand new year and I'm sincerely hoping it is a good one for all of you so far. I wonder how many of you are still sticking to your New Year's resolutions for 2010. You know all those wonderful promises you made to yourselves when you discovered that the waistband on your pants wasn't making it anymore, or that the old smoking habit was leaving you a little short of breath when you last tried running for a bus. Sure, a little healthy exercise or abstention is a good thing in moderation but don't go over the top, because I'm up here to tell you that you can jog your way to Heaven if you want, but you're still going to pop your clogs in the end. So just take it easy, okay? Take me for instance; I'm the perfect couch-potato example; some smartarse gave me a Bullworker body-building exerciser for Christmas and I'm still trying to open the box that the bloody thing came in.

On that merry little note I trust that you are all keeping well and happy and that the winter weather isn't getting to you too much. For those on sick parade, I wish you speedy recoveries from whatever you are suffering from and hope that you are soon on the mend. If you think the only ones having problems with their data base are the Submarine Museum, then you should see the filing shambles we have up here. One of my jobs is to help St. Peter maintain the records, so I decided to take a quick sneaky shufti at my own file the other day. He often adds his own remarks and assessments on these files and my mine was no exception. I know I was often affectionately referred to as "the little leprechaun" by the Merseyside lads but I was mortified to read that Pete had written, "Jones gives the impression upon leaving the navy that he would have been best employed as a lumberjack on a mushroom farm." The cheeky sod; I'll have him know that I worked at Ford's as a test driver with Ronnie Corbett on their Scalectrix track, so there!

Here's one for you: An Irish priest was transferred to Bootle Catholic Church. The first morning Father O'Malley rose from his bed to find it was a beautiful spring day in his new parish. He walked to the bedroom window to take a breath of fresh air and then he noticed there was a donkey lying dead in the middle of his front lawn. Not knowing who else to call, he promptly phoned the local police station. The conversation went like this. "Good morning, this is Sergeant Smith, How may I help you?" "The best of the day to your good self, this is Father O'Malley at St. Francis Xavier Catholic Church. There's a donkey lying dead right in the middle of my front lawn." Sergeant Smith, who thought he was quite the rapier wit, replied with a smirk, "Well now Father, it was always my impression that you people take care of the last rites." There was dead silence on the line for a long moment and then Father O'Malley replied: "Ah! To be sure that's true; but we are obliged to notify the next of kin on these occasions."

Now, say a Chief Tiff was working on a lathe turning out a machine part and kept making a cock-up of the job and tossing those rejects into the scrap bin; sure, it wouldn't be too long before someone would be asking him to give an account of himself. Have you noticed it doesn't quite work that way with doctors? Well that's because they get to bury their mistakes with practically no questions asked. But to be fair, doctors are only human; like the rest of us, they don't always manage to get things right. Whilst diagnosing the course of treatment for my last condition, they decided in their collective wisdom that I needed a testicle removed to arrest the problem. Suffice to say, in the final analysis they were wrong and the procedure proved to be completely unnecessary. At the time, I was in traumatic shock at the very thought of it all, so to cheer myself up a wee bit I wrote this little ditty:

I went to the clinic at Walton  
To see the urology man  
He said, "Mr Jones, you have problems  
I've got the results of your scan."

One bollock is rather abnormal  
Of that there is never a doubt  
And if you want my honest opinion  
It's best that the bastard comes out.

I said, "Are you positive Doctor?"  
As my heart did a bit of a lurch  
"I'd far rather sing like Dean Martin  
Than that little Welsh girl, Charlotte Church."

He said, "Mr Jones – do not doubt me  
Amongst surgeons I'm known as a cracker  
So like it or lump it old fellow  
You're going to lose your left knacker."

So here is a grand invitation  
I extend it to one and to all  
On the day after my operation  
I'm having a Coming-Out Ball.

I see that congratulations are in order for **CPOW01 John Hendren MBE**, for his inclusion in the Queen's Honours List for his valuable contribution to the *HMS/M Astute* build project. I remember telling **Ray Hedgecock MBE**, when he received his award from the Prince of Wales, that the Queen usually can't be bothered doing Stokers. But I'm sure this doesn't apply to Coxswain's, though, as you lot are already on speaking terms with the Big Man himself. **Bravo Zulu mate**. Well got to go as I have the harping party detail to do but will see you in next issue. God bless all down there and look out for each other okay?



**Mick**

***"Being submariners gave us a life experience that would be extremely hard to beat and certainly impossible to afford."***

## The Last Kilo Limp Home



The Russian Black Sea Fleet suffered a major blow when its only operational submarine, a 19 year-old Kilo-Class boat (pictured above), broke down at sea in November of 2009 and limped back to base on partial power. The only other boat in the fleet a 29 year-old Tango Class, is undergoing repairs (and appears likely to continue doing so for some time). During the Cold War, the Black Sea Fleet had thirty or more submarines. Today the Black Sea Fleet is a pretty ragtag outfit, equipped with Cold War leftovers (the Kilo-Class boat was the youngest major ship that it has). Most of the fifteen major surface ships are in need of repair, or not able to leave port at all. Some of the twenty minesweepers and missile-equipped patrol boats date from the 1990s, but for the most part, the once formidable Black Sea Fleet is now a rest home for Cold War relics.

The government recently ordered the navy to concentrate on building new ships for the Black and Baltic Seas, instead of planning a high seas aircraft carrier fleet. The Black Sea Fleet has been continually declining since the Soviet Union dissolved in 1991. That decline was the result of new countries (like Ukraine and Georgia) inheriting old Soviet ships and bases. That was the dissolution deal. Whatever Soviet weapons or bases were previously held now belonged to one or another of 14 new nations. Most of Russia's high seas ships were based in northern Russia (the Northern Fleet, based next to Finland and Norway) or the Far East (the Pacific Fleet, based north of China and North Korea). But the Baltic and Black Sea fleets were largely based in ports that were now part of a foreign nation. Russia negotiated a lease on their large naval base in Sevastopol, but that lease expires in eight years, and it is not going to be renewed. So Russia is building a new base to the east, on the Russian Black Sea coast.

For over a century, Russia had four fleets (Northern, Pacific, Baltic and Black Sea). The latter two were virtually destroyed by the dissolution. Now Russia is having political problems (largely caused by Russia) with Georgia and Ukraine, and could really use some additional and modern naval power. To a lesser extent, the same situation applies in the Baltic where Estonia and Lithuania harboured, and often built, many of the Soviet ships of the Baltic Fleet. Poland, while not part of the Soviet Union was a major naval ally, as was East Germany but their respective ports of Gdansk, Gdynia and Rostock, their facilities are now denied to any Russian access. Thus, the Baltic Fleet is a fraction of what it once was, and needs rebuilding if that can be feasibly achieved by Russia in future years.

**Post Script:** To make matters worse for our old adversaries, the word around Moscow is that the crews of the two Akula-Class boats detected last year off the coast of North America were not hailed as heroes when they returned home last December. Whilst this was the first time in a decade Russian boats have operated in the western Atlantic, apparently they were supposed to go there and return undetected. That's how it is done in the submarine business, especially when you are sending two of Russia's latest, and most difficult to detect, boats to do the job.

## The Bubblehead May Soon Be a Lady

As of November 2009 the US Navy started taking its first positive steps towards allowing women to serve aboard their submarines. The diehards amongst us may treat this latest revelation with some degree of distain and laughter, but let's not forget that when it rains in America, it usually means we in the UK need to start opening our umbrellas. In short, it could well happen here, too. To this end, the US Naval Academy was asked to survey its female midshipmen to see how many would want to join the Submarine Service. About two dozen said they were interested for one of the seven slots the Academy has been told will be available. The Navy plan to initially allow women on their SSBNs or "Bombers", mainly because they have sufficient room to provide separate quarters for the women. These boats have two crews, which alternate running them on their 77 day cruises. In between each patrol, the boats are in port for about 35 days for maintenance, advanced crew training and re-supply.



One compelling reason for allowing women to serve is the growing shortage of men willing to do so. Last September, the Naval Academy produced only 92 officers for submarine duty that required 120. Submariners must be volunteers, and satisfy strict physical, psychological and academic qualifications. This would not be the first time female naval officers have served on American boats. There are twelve submarine qualified female officers in the navy. That is, they have all taken the training required for someone to serve on a submarine. There is a lot of training on the boat before you become part of the crew, but these women are qualified and have served for short periods as Technical Specialists, sharing a two-berth cabin. Other navies (Australia, Canada, Denmark, Sweden, Norway and Spain) allow women to serve on boats, but not all those countries have had many, if any, women actually volunteer for the service. Those nations that already allow women on boats are non-nuclear and stay at sea for far shorter periods than the US bombers. They have got used to the lack of privacy and both genders have adapted as have mixed crews on surface warships.

But the wives of American submariners are openly hostile to the idea of mixed male/female crews because of well, the sex factor, and have not been reluctant to make their concerns known. They know it has taken place on surface ships with mixed crews and it has caused some marriages to break up. There are far fewer places compared to surface ships, for a couple to have clandestine sex, but this sexual activity, although banned on all US warships, does happen. The berthing problem seems overrated as other navies have simply put up a curtain or two to separate the male/female berthing. The officers and NCOs have shared cabins, and if the plans go ahead, it will be women officers first, as that is where the greatest shortages are. Not a lot of men are willing to go through all the training and tests to qualify for a job as an enlisted sailor on a nuclear boat, and it is highly probable fewer women will be interested. Only time will tell what the future holds for US submarine crewing in this highly sensitive gender area.

# The Ditty Box

## Cry Baby Dolphins

Who would have thought, within the ranks of the Royal Navy, the green pangs of envy would emerge amongst its service personnel? The latest buzz is that our rather spoilt General Service counterparts are feeling a tad left out and jealous of us submariners, because we proudly get to wear the Submariners Badge of qualification. It seems from all accounts that the Admiralty are so concerned about the whinging little darlings that they are planning a new piece of decorative bling for them to wear on their No 1 uniforms in order to placate them. Its design has yet to be decided but they are already being dubbed "Cry Baby Dolphins" by those within the ranks of the silent service. Perhaps they should only be awarded to those skimmers that can complete an operational deployment without the benefits of e-mail and the use of mobile phones. That way they would only have to cast one badge and that could go to the Imperial War Museum for historic display purposes. Where does it all end, FFS? They will want the equivalent of submarine pay next. If that happened, then who would we sundodgers have to chuck our small change at? The mind boggles, and even the boggles' mind, I can tell you.

## Shep Woolley Benefit Show

Our old mate, **Shep the Singing Gunlayer**, is in Liverpool during the month of April to attend an HMS Ganges Reunion to entertain those attending that function. Whilst he is here he has kindly offered to do a benefit show for Merseyside Submariners on the 29<sup>th</sup> April which would normally be a social night for us at the Cornmarket Hotel. **Paul Hedgecock** has arranged for us to use HMS Eaglet as the venue for the show as it has bigger seating capacity and better facilities for our star performer. **HMS Eaglet Old & Bold** will be hosting the event, and it is intended to send the word out to neighbouring SA and RNA branches inviting them to attend the show. Tickets are being nominally priced at £5 per head and all proceeds will go directly to Merseyside Submariners Association. Subsequently, the social evening that night at the Cornmarket Hotel is now cancelled. We anticipate that demand will be high, so if you want to do your bit for the branch and have a cracking evening's entertainment into the bargain, then buy or reserve your tickets from me a.s.a.p.

**Post Script:** Just a reminder that from the March AGM we will require a standard bearer, as **Dave Devins** will be standing down from then. I stress this is a most important role within our organisation that desperately needs to be filled, for obvious reasons. We now need someone to step up to the plate and volunteer. This branch does not belong to either me or your committee; it is your branch and the load needs to be shared in the successful and efficient running of it. We need your help now. What more can I say?

