



AHOY SHIPMATE

RNA Torbay Newsletter

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Water

A woman goes to the Doctor, worried about her husband's temper.

The Doctor asks "What's the problem? The woman says:

"Doctor, I don't know what to do. Every day my husband seems to lose his temper for no reason. It scares me."

The Doctor says "I have a cure for that. When it seems that your husband is getting angry, just take a glass of water and start swishing it in your mouth. Just swish and swish but don't swallow it until he either leaves the room or calms down.

Two weeks later the woman comes back to the doctor looking fresh and reborn. The woman says

"Doctor that was a brilliant idea! Every time my husband started losing it, I swished with water. I swished and swished, and he calmed right down! How does a glass of water do that?"

The Doctor says "The water itself does nothing. It's keeping your mouth shut that does the trick".

Editorial

By Shipmate Norrie Millen

Hi! Shipmates,

How has your year been so far? Better than mine, I trust. Now three weeks into a very bad chest infection, which foolishly I aggravated by coming out on cold evening to deliver my Welfare Seminar report to John. Then rubbed 'salt into wound' by attending Shipmate Peter Brown's 90th birthday bash. Don't get me wrong, it was a fantastic affair, the food and company excellent and it was nice to see Peter up and about and surrounded by his extended family. Several after dinner toasts and speeches were made before I decided on leaving and getting back to my 'sick bed'



Literally counting the minutes until I could get back into a warm bed, I had just exited Besigheim Way (South Devon Highway) and heading down to the large roundabout to take Teignmouth road. As I slowed to exit the slip round, went to change down (gears) and found I could not. Just a horrible expensive grinding sound! Managed to coast onto the grass of the roundabout, offside wheels hanging dangerously into lane and placed a call to AA Rescue. As, I was considered to be in a very dangerous position, the AA placed me on very high priority list, which was good as it only took the rescue van and hour to turn up! Eventually towed to a repair facility, I did not get home for two hours after I left Peter's party.

Now my wallet is £488 lighter because of getting new clutch. I had intended to pay with my credit card until the garage receptionist informed me it would cost me an extra £100 to use a credit card. So beware when using the credit card on large bills, it could cost you more money than you want to spend.

In closing, I will touch on the In/Out campaign of remaining members of the EEC. I remember and seem to feel we were much better off before we joined the market, I could be wrong. No matter how we all feel the politicians will get their way and leave us high and dry no doubt.

The way I see it anyway!

Chairman's Corner

By Shipmate John Soanes



The Branch seems to be on a steady course at present, New member S/M Nigel Monks joined us in March and I understand another is 'in the pipeline' to join in April or May, new members are most welcome, we need some young blood to make sure the Branch continues. Who knows? We may yet to find a volunteer delegate to represent the branch at Annual Conference.

As agreed at the last meeting, I am seeking quotes from local stonemasons to re-furbish (or possibly replace) the granite plaque on the memorial to Lieutenant Commander Arthur Leyland Harrison VC RN situated on Roundham Head, Paignton.

It certainly needs work as it is beginning to look extremely shabby, especially the inscription, it needs to be cut much deeper. Hopefully, the three quotes will be available at the April meeting; we can then seek ideas as to how we will raise sufficient cash to pay for the work. It is important that we get it done well in time for the 100th anniversary on 23rd April 2018. The actual garden area surrounding the memorial can easily be restored by a local gardener or volunteers from the branch!

A monograph entitled **Boy on a Battleship** published by the TON Class Association recording observations of life aboard the battleship HMS DUKE OF YORK in 1948 by TCA member CPO Spike Wheeler, (A good friend of mine) then a Boy Seaman. There is no one currently serving in the Royal Navy who has ever seen a battleship and very few in the RNA or any other associations, who actually served in one.

The monograph is in the form of a diary with comments about daily routine in a battleship. It is a unique record of that era and has a particular value of being life seen through the eyes of a teenage Boy Seaman. As such, it has value for the serious historian, as well as former sailors everywhere.

Spike's descriptions of exercises on a grand scale and conduct of 14 - inch gun shoots would be hard for most former sailors to match. His observations of routine in the Captain's Office are quite different to the experiences gained by some of us in small ships. However, the passages, which many will find of most interest, are his views on the wealth of goods, and particularly foodstuffs, available in the Caribbean and USA. Comparisons with the extant Post-War rationing in Britain are an eye-opener!

This monograph follows other extracts of the diary kept by Spike throughout his 28 years' service in the RN, including clearing the Suez Canal Block-ships in 1956, search for the lost Scimitar aircraft in 1958 and the 1000 foot dive in 1959.

Boy on a Battleship, You will enjoy the 30 pages of Spike's diary if you: ever served in a battleship, or ever wondered what it was like to live in a floating barracks with over 2000 others. If you enjoy tales from the Lower Deck, especially seen through the eyes of a Boy Seaman or can reminisce about the when the RN still had capital ships, or if you are a student of Social History of the Royal Navy.

£1 from each copy sold is donated to the RNBT. The softback illustrated monograph is available for a modest £7.50 inc. P & P.

Cheque payable to Ton Class Association, which I am more than happy to collect and forward.



Life onboard a warship in our much-reduced Royal Navy

By Nigel Farndale – *The Spectator* – February 7th 2016

Submitted by Shipmate Mick Dowling HMS Ulster 1958-60

The helmsman's a woman, the wardrooms are unisex... but the stokers are disappearing in droves

The Royal Navy is known as the Senior Service because of its illustrious history; Francis Drake and all that. However the days when it ruled the waves have long gone. In 1945, it had almost 900 warships and a million men. By the time of the Falklands War, it was down to 70 warships and 70,000 men. Now it is less than half that, with more admirals than there are fighting ships.

The arrival this year of HMS *Queen Elizabeth*, the much-heralded new aircraft carrier that has cost £6 billion (for 50-odd years of life), will draw unwelcome attention to the Navy's significant manpower shortages. As one senior officer put it, the carrier will bring 'new challenges, relearning old tricks perhaps and some new — not least how to man it'. They put a brave face on things, as you would expect. But what is morale really like in the Royal Navy?

To find out, I joined HMS *Bulwark* on manoeuvres in the Mediterranean for a few days. I was given unprecedented access — I went up in a £100 million submarine-hunting Merlin helicopter, and out at night with Royal Marine commandos in one of the ship's four giant assault landing craft. Most edifying of all, I got the chance to talk candidly with everyone from the stokers in the engine room to a visiting commodore over dinner in the captain's cabin. I also found myself taking part in a 'man overboard' drill.

They still refer to a 'man overboard' even though 10 per cent of the crew are now women — including, incidentally, the 'helmsman' in the rescue boat. There was some resistance to the introduction of women to frontline duties back in 1990. But now no one notices. The wardrooms are unisex, and women do the jobs men do.



Doing the rounds of the ship is a DVD of *Sailor*, the 1970's BBC TV documentary set on HMS *Ark Royal*. Officers are amazed at scenes showing porn mags lying around the wardrooms. That wouldn't

happen today. They are intrigued that all the officers speak in public-school accents, which is no longer the case. However what surprises them most is how not much else has changed, especially in terms of the 'Jack speak' (as in Jolly Jack Tar). The paymaster is still 'the Pusser', your bunk is still your 'grot' and even some now very un-PC terms survive, such as '-gollies' (naval intelligence officers). They still toast the Queen sitting down, and the toast to Nelson on Trafalgar Day is still *'The Immortal Memory'*, followed by silence.

However, the captain told me other traditions are being lost to political correctness. The Saturday toast 'To our wives and sweethearts; may they never meet' has recently been replaced by 'To our families', which he thinks 'lacks humour, somewhat'. He also rues the recent changing of traditional senior titles, such as 'flag officers' to 'assistant chiefs of naval staff', which he thinks has less gravitas and 'tone'; something about which the Royal Navy has traditionally cared deeply.

In other areas, the language has changed with the times. When I sat in on briefings, I understood about 20 per cent of what was being said because the Navy speaks in acronyms. When the captain wanted to pass on congratulations to the company on the way they conducted themselves on shore, for example, he said: 'BZs all round.' It stands for Bravo Zulu and means 'Well done'.

Another surprisingly modern departure from traditional Navy decorum and reserve (think Noël Coward in *In Which We Serve*) is the way the service is slightly obsessed with Twitter. It has two million followers, which is pretty impressive, but still.

Down in the engine room, I encountered some disaffection. None of the stokers on *Bulwark* are planning to leave, but elsewhere in the Navy, they are disappearing in droves, partly because of the 2010 Strategic Defence Review. The RN agreed to far too many cuts, some 6,000 sailors, only to find they are now 3,000 to 4,000 men (and women) short. Turmoil in the Middle East and Russia's aggression everywhere — Putin is no slouch at getting propaganda images of his warships firing cruise missiles at Syria on to the news — have since forced the government to take the threats to Britain's national security more seriously.

Even so, after the defence review last November, the Royal Navy was underwhelmed by the allocation of a mere 450 extra sailors to make up the shortfall. They have been told they will have to find the rest by transferring sailors from other ships, which means longer deployments.

The RN will even have to recruit sailors from foreign navies to fill gaps in specialist engineering, and lately the Admiralty has been busy writing to former stokers now in Civvy Street, asking if they will consider returning. There haven't been many takers, not least because they get paid so much more in civilian jobs, and life at sea is so hard. They sleep in cramped conditions,

three bunks high, and rarely see daylight because there are no windows on the ship, apart from on the bridge. 'If it's steak for dinner it must be Saturday,' one said to me. Another complained: 'We're in a lower pay-band than the stewards, and all they do is fluff up officers' pillows.' He added: 'In the past the main incentive to do this job for 22 years was the pension, but now that has been cut to a quarter of what it was.'

Last summer, *Bulwark* was a familiar sight on TV as it rescued thousands of migrants from overcrowded boats off the coast of Libya. Though all the crew members I talked to found this humanitarian mission rewarding, the reality was less heart-warming than the news footage suggested. One officer told me that when they came on board, the first question some migrants asked was: 'Where can I charge my iPhone?' And the stench was terrible, with the dozen or so Portaloos in the hold unable to cope.

Parliament has soon to decide whether or not to build four replacement Trident submarines. The move has majority public support, but Jeremy Corbyn and Nicola Sturgeon oppose it, so the subject will be hotly debated. In the cabinet room at No. 10, meanwhile, there is now a model of the *Queen Elizabeth*, a daily reminder to the PM of what a useful asset he will soon have at his disposal, both as 'hard power' and 'soft'. (Russian envoys can expect a few invitations to cocktails on board.)

So, with all this duality of purpose, is the Royal Navy's identity crisis set to deepen? When I asked Captain Nick Cooke-Priest, shortly before we sailed into harbour at Malta, he dismissed the idea, 'because one of our primary functions is to protect the seaways that underpin the nation's economy and that hasn't changed.' He did concede that 'We do need to get some equilibrium back, after years of managed decline.'



History of the Swastika

Researched by Shipmate Norrie Millen



The average person (including you) sees this flag and immediately thinks of NAZI

Germany. However I know it will surprise you to learn that History of the Swastika or symbol dates back 12,000 years!

The swastika has an extensive history. It was used at least 5,000 years before Adolf Hitler designed the Nazi flag.

The word *swastika* comes from the Sanskrit *svastika*, which means "good fortune or well-being." The motif (a hooked cross) appears to have first been used in Neolithic Eurasia, perhaps representing the movement



of the sun through the sky. To this day, it is a sacred symbol in Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism,

and Odinism. It is a common sight on temples or houses in India or Indonesia. Swastikas also have an ancient history in Europe, appearing on artefacts from pre-Christian European cultures.

The symbol experienced a resurgence in the late nineteenth century, following extensive archaeological work such as that of the famous archaeologist Heinrich Schliemann. Schliemann discovered the hooked cross on the site of ancient Troy. He connected it with similar shapes found on pottery in Germany and speculated that it was a "significant religious symbol of our remote ancestors."

In the beginning of the twentieth century, the swastika was widely used in Europe. It had numerous meanings, the most common being a symbol of good luck and

auspiciousness. However, the work of Schliemann soon was taken up by *völkisch* movements, for whom the swastika was a symbol of "Aryan identity" and German nationalist pride

This conjecture of Aryan cultural descent of the German people is likely one of the main reasons why the Nazi party formally adopted the swastika or *Hakenkreuz* (Ger., hooked cross) as its symbol in 1920.

The Nazi party, however, was not the only party to use the swastika in Germany. After World War I, a number of far-right nationalist movements adopted the swastika. As a symbol, it became associated with the idea of a racially "pure" state. By the time the Nazis gained control of Germany, the connotations of the swastika had forever changed.

In *Mein Kampf*, Adolf Hitler wrote: "I myself, meanwhile, after innumerable attempts, had laid down a final form; a flag with a red background, a white disk, and a black swastika in the middle. After long trials I also found a definite proportion between the size of the flag and the size of the white disk, as well as the shape and thickness of the swastika."

A Maypole topped with a swastika is raised for a May Day parade in the Lustgarten in Berlin. The May holiday became an important celebration in the Nazi calendar. Germany, April 26, 1939.



The swastika would become the most recognizable icon of Nazi propaganda, appearing on the flag referred to by Hitler in *Mein Kampf* as well as on election posters, arm bands, medallions, and badges for military and other organizations. A potent symbol intended to elicit pride among Aryans; the swastika also struck terror into Jews and others deemed enemies of Nazi Germany.

Despite its origins, the swastika has become so widely associated with Nazi Germany that contemporary uses frequently incite controversy.

The swastika (also known as the gammadion cross, cross cramponnée, or wanzi) (as a character: 卐 or 卐) is an ancient religious symbol that generally takes the form of an equilateral cross, with its four legs bent at 90 degrees. It is considered to be a sacred

and auspicious symbol in Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism and dates back to before 2nd century B.C.

**The symbol of the Swastika
and its 12,000-year-old
history**

It has been used as a decorative element in various cultures since at least the Neolithic. It is known most widely as an important symbol long used in Indian religions, denoting "auspiciousness."

It was adopted as such in pre-World War I-Europe and later, and most notably, by the Nazi Party and Nazi Germany prior to World War II. In many Western countries, the swastika has been highly stigmatized because of its use in and association with Nazism.^[4] This has happened to the point where it is seen as meaning Nazis and Hitler.

It continues to be commonly used as a religious symbol in Hinduism and Buddhism.

Western literature's older term for the symbol, *gammadion cross*, derives mainly from its appearance, which is identical to four Greek gamma letters affixed to each other.

The name *swastika* comes from the Sanskrit word *svastika* (Devanāgarī: स्वस्तिका), meaning "lucky or auspicious object".

The swastika is a symbol used by one of the most hated men on Earth, a symbol that represents the slaughter of millions of people and one of the most destructive wars on Earth. However, Adolf Hitler was not the first to use this symbol. In fact, it was used as a powerful symbol thousands of years before him, across many cultures and continents.

For the Hindus and Buddhists in India and other Asian countries, the swastika was an important symbol for many thousands of years and, to this day, the symbol can still be seen in abundance - on temples, buses, taxis, and on the cover of books. It was also used in Ancient Greece and can be found in the remains of the ancient city of Troy, which existed 4,000 years ago. The ancient Druids and the Celts also used the symbol, reflected in many artefacts that have been discovered. It was used by Nordic tribes and even early Christians used the Swastika as one of their symbols, including the Teutonic Knights, a German medieval military

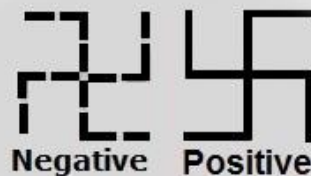


order, which became a purely religious Catholic Order. But why is this symbol so important and why did Adolf Hitler decide to use it?

The word *śvastika* is a Sanskrit word (*śvastika*) meaning *It is* *Well Being*, *Good Existence*, and *Good Luck*. However, it is also known by different names in different countries - like *Wan* in China, *Manji* in Japan, *Fylfot* in England, *Hakenkreuz* in Germany and *Tetraskelion* or *Tetragrammion* in Greece.

A Sanskrit scholar P. R. Sarkar in 1979 said that the deeper meaning of the word is *Permanent Victory*. He also said that as any symbol it can have positive and negative meaning depending on how it is drawn. So in Hinduism, the right-hand swastika is a symbol of the God Vishnu and the Sun, while the left-hand swastika is a symbol of Kali and Magic. The double meaning of symbols is common in ancient traditions, like

for example the symbol of the pentagram (five pointed star), which is viewed as negative when pointing downwards, and positive when pointing upwards.



The earliest swastika ever found was uncovered in Mezine, Ukraine, carved on an ivory figurine, which dates an incredible 12,000 years. One of the earliest cultures that are known to have used the Swastika was a Neolithic culture in Southern Europe, in the area that is now Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, known as the Vinca Culture, which dates back around 8,000 years.

In Buddhism, the swastika is a symbol of good fortune, prosperity, abundance and eternity. It is directly related to Buddha and can be found carved on statues on the soles of his feet and on his heart. It is said that it contains Buddha's mind.



On the walls of the Christian catacombs in Rome, the symbol of the Swastika appears next to the words

óZOTIKO ZOTIKOô which means óLife of Lifeô. It can also be found on the window openings of the mysterious Lalibela Rock churches of Ethiopia, and in various other churches around the world.



In Nordic Myths, Odin is represented passing through space as a whirling disk or swastika looking down through all worlds. In North America, the swastika was used by the Navajos. In Ancient Greece, Pythagoras used the Swastika under the name ôTetraktysö and it was a symbol linking heaven and earth, with the right arm pointing to heaven and its left arm pointing to Earth.

It has been used by the Phoenicians as a symbol of the Sun and it was a sacred symbol used by the priestesses.

How and why did so many diverse countries and cultures, across many eras, use the same symbol and apparently with the same meaning?

It is ironic, and unfortunate, that a symbol of life and eternity that was considered sacred for thousands of years has become a symbol of hatred.



The swastika, the Phoenician sun symbol, on the Phoenician Craig-Narget stone in Scotland, and on the robe of a Phoenician high priestess.



"Females mess cleaning party!"

Life for John!



*A smiling Shipmate John Soanes on being awarded Life membership of the Royal Naval Association by Vice President Miked Seaward. Awarded for his **outstanding contribution** and **long dedication** to the to the Branch. He was a very surprised recipient, as the member's had had a secret paper ballot which resulting in a unanimous vote to make the award. **Bravo Zulu John**, a well-deserved recognition for all of your hard work.*



"I see you aspire to bigger and better things!"

This U.S Aircraft Carrier Did Not Exist

There was no USS 'Robin'...

One of the strange little stories of World War II involves the aircraft carrier USS Robin, which didn't really exist... There was a carrier that sailors called the *Robin*. She and her sailors were underneath U.S. Navy command, took part in American battles and launched U.S. planes with American pilots. She certainly was a carrier, not to be confused with another USS *Robin*, a minesweeper.



But the carrier *Robin*, generally speaking, was an illusion.

So what was going on? Turns out, *Robin* was the product of the Navy's desperation in the Pacific theatre during the tumultuous months of late 1942 and early 1943. *Robin* was actually the codenamed HMS *Victorious*, a British *Illustrious*-class carrier leased to the United States.

At the time, America needed every carrier it could get.

"Aircraft carriers had arrived at the point of technological development that they gave a range-extension option that was not available to a battleship fleet," historian Francis Pike wrote in his recent and exhaustive book *Hirohito's War*.

"With overwhelming superiority in terms of numbers of carriers, quality of aircraft and above all, superb fliers, brilliantly led and trained, Japan needed to bring the U.S. Pacific Navy to battle as soon as possible."

HMS *Victorious* before she became USS *Robin*. Royal Navy photo



December 1942 was one of America's low points. It was a year after Pearl Harbor and the Japanese fleet had not yet been crushed. In the South Pacific, the Navy had one fully operational fleet carrier, USS *Saratoga*. Japanese aircraft and destroyers sent the carrier USS *Hornet* to the bottom in October. USS *Enterprise* was battered. Army troops and Marines had just begun expelling the last of Japan's troops from

Guadalcanal — the beginning of an island hopping campaign that would eventually extend thousands of miles into the Western Pacific. A renewed Japanese carrier assault could reverse these early, meagre gains. That's when HMS *Victorious* came to rescue the American fleet.

The carrier first arrived for her refit at Norfolk Naval Shipyard in January 1943.

After the Norfolk refit, the *Victorious* transited the Panama Canal and arrived at Pearl Harbor in March 1943 to join the Saratoga Battle Group, Task Force 14.

Between March and May, the *Victorious* underwent

additional modifications at Pearl to specifically handle the American versions of the Grumman TBF Avenger (or British Avenger) and F4F Wildcat (British Martlet). To complete the

makeover and new look, the *Victorious* temporarily shed her typical British Atlantic "admiralty disruptive camouflage scheme" (irregular patterns of dark and light tones) for the American standard navy Gray.

On May 17, 1943, the *Victorious*, now code-named

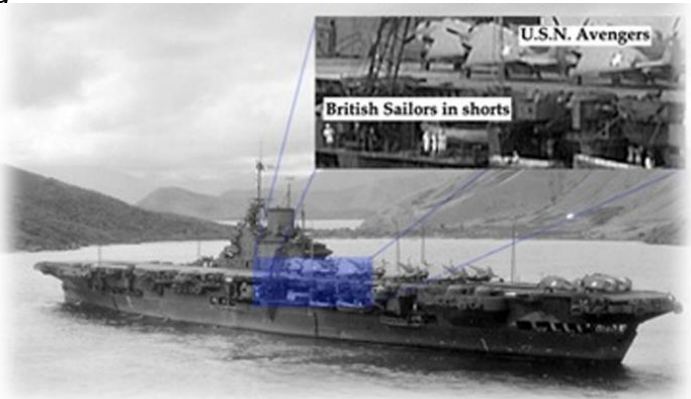


"Robin," along with USS *Saratoga*, arrived at the Solomon Islands as part of Task Force 36 commanded by Rear Admiral DeWitt Ramsey, USN. The *Saratoga* and *Victorious* would become the core of Task Group 36.3 under Rear Admiral F. P. Sherman along with the USS *North Carolina* (BB-55), USS *Massachusetts* (BB-59), USS *Indiana* (BB-58), USS *San Diego* (CL-53), US *San Juan* (CL-54), HMAS *Australia* (D84 a heavy cruiser) and several escort vessels. Her ship's crew was British, but her aircrew and aircraft were American. No one involved had any illusions that she wouldn't be identified as the *Victorious* by enemy pilots, so she proudly flew her British Jack throughout her time with the Yanks, even when only

the Yanks were flying on and off her flight deck!

Of Note:

At the time U.S. carriers had wooden flight decks and suffered greatly from Kamikaze attacks, but British carriers had steel decks and fared much better.



Satan the messenger dog who helped Allies turn tide of Great War remembered 100 years on

The black crossbreed dodged German bullets as he dashed across no-man's land during bloody Battle of Verdun to deliver a vital message to French soldiers

Loyal friend: Soldier and messenger dog wearing a gas mask Image

A brave messenger dog called Satan survived a hail of German bullets to help turn the tide in the bloody Battle of Verdun, which began 100 years ago on Sunday.

Pitifully wounded, he staggered through no-man's-land with a broken leg.

And even after seeing his master shot dead he pressed on to bring hope to a besieged battalion – encouraging them to renew the fight and end the enemy push on Paris.

Satan's amazing dash is an almost-forgotten act of valour in one of the bloodiest battles of the First World War.

American war reporter Albert Peyson Terhune wrote: "The garrison was able to hold out until reinforcements came all because one hairy mongrel refused to die while his errand was still uncompleted and because he was too loyal to quit."

Hellish: French infantry during lull in Verdun shelling Image

Verdun was one of the longest battles in history. It was also one of the most savage.

More than 300,000 men lost their lives in a hellish struggle, which raged around the ancient French city on the River Meuse from February to December 1916.

The Germans first attacked on February 21. They aimed to "bleed the French army white" and force them to surrender, leaving Britain to fight on alone.



By autumn, soldiers trapped inside Verdun were badly outnumbered and outgunned. Supplies were running low, so was morale.

One French officer said "the whole valley was turned into a volcano, its exit blocked by the barrier of the slain".

A small contingent of soldiers boxed in by the enemy had been ordered to hold out until reinforcements arrived.

For days they fought on but no help came. Telephone and telegraph lines were down and no homing pigeons remained to send word of their desperate plight.

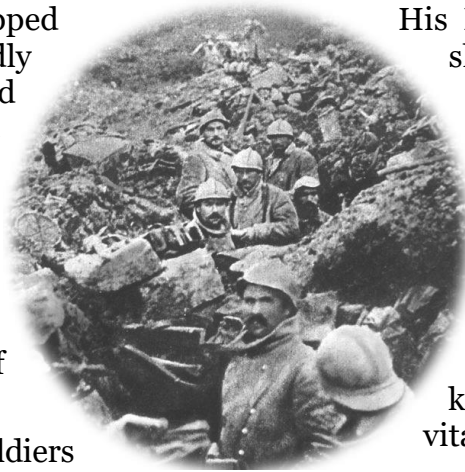
Seven men had tried to deliver messages to HQ. All had been cut down.

Then the besieged troops, low on food, ammunition and hope, peered from their trenches during a fresh artillery onslaught and saw an amazing sight. But Satan had heard his master's voice and it was enough to spur him on.

A large winged shadow was racing towards them, moving so fast it almost appeared to be flying. At first it was difficult to tell exactly what the apparition was. It wore a hideous gas mask and across its shoulders was something that looked almost like wings.

Some soldiers thought their prayers had been answered by a "heavenly saviour" like the Angel of Mons who supposedly appeared to protect the heavily outnumbered British army in 1914.

But one French soldier knew otherwise. Duvalle was a dog handler who trained two messenger dogs to carry communications.



His Irish setter named Rip was shot dead shortly after being sent to the front. But his other dog, a black crossbreed named Satan, had cheated the guns time and again.

When Duvalle saw the black shape sprinting across the wasteland he knew it was Satan carrying a vital message.

He called out, urging him on. When the dog heard his master's voice he quickened his pace, leaping from crater to crater.

For the first mile and a half he was able to dash between bushes to avoid being spotted but the second half of his journey was across open fields.

When the Germans spotted Satan they unleashed their entire arsenal in his direction, determined to stop him delivering his message.

Journalist Terhune wrote: "Satan staggered to his feet, reeling and dizzy. For an instant he seemed to have lost his way. Then he settled into the steady run again.

"No longer could he travel so fast or use the bullet-dodging gait his trainers had taught him. Yet it did not occur to his great soul to call it a day and to collapse under his wounds and the mortal agony that wracked him."

Satan stumbled on, his wounded leg hanging limp, miraculously making it to the French trench where he collapsed shivering into the arms of the waiting soldiers.

The troops gently removed his gas mask and retrieved the letter from the brass tube attached to his collar. It read: "For God's sake hold on. We will relieve you tomorrow."



Then they saw the “wings” on Satan’s back were actually two baskets. Inside each was a carrier pigeon scared almost to death.

The captain scrawled two messages giving co-ordinates for the German gun battery that was reducing the town to rubble. He told his commanders he would hold on but begged them to take out the guns.

He pressed the notes into small metal tubes attached to the pigeons’ legs and cast them into the air.

German snipers were waiting and shot down the first pigeon but the second escaped and flew to HQ.

An hour later the roar of the French guns began and the German battery fell silent, smashed to rubble.

It was the beginning of the end for the enemy.

Satan was not the only canine hero from the First World War. More than 50,000 dogs served in the trenches. They performed some of the most dangerous jobs: carrying messages, pulling ammunition carts, and acting as sentries near the top of the trenches, to quietly alert their owners to enemy intruders.

It is rumoured that Adolf Hitler kept a dog when he served as a lance corporal on the Western Front.

Britain even set up the War Dog School of Instruction in 1917 to recruit and train animals. Run by Lt Col Edwin Richardson, it trained many of the 7,000 pets given by owners to fight – and in many cases to die – for their country.



It is not clear what became of Satan. Some accounts say that once his job was done he “treated his tortured body to the luxury of death”. Others claim he slowly recovered from his injuries and retired from the army a national hero.

But there is no doubt how badly the battle devastated Verdun and the surrounding countryside.

Names of the 162,000 French dead are listed on the battlefield Douaumont Ossuary memorial.

The carnage was so appalling both the French and Germans referred to Verdun as “Hell”. A crescent of land covering 25,000 acres around the town was soaked with so much arsenic from exploding shells that the government bought the land and declared it a “red zone” where nobody was allowed to live. They planted forests across the region but 100 years on much of the land remains grey and lifeless, the trees unable to grow because of the poisonous chemicals seeping through the soil.

Just setting foot in those woods can be deadly. They are still littered by unexploded shells – up to 15% of ordnance fired during the First World War did not detonate.

In 2007 a mine blew up, killing two workers who were carrying it to a munitions plant to be defused.

The following year the government decided to fence off the worst affected area for ever, the Place-a-gaz in the Spincourt Forest.

In these eerie woods the scars of history’s longest battle will never heal.

Bizarrely, despite no British forces taking part, the battle prompted hundreds of wartime parents to name their babies Verdun.



A total of 901 children were given the name including a brother of Hollywood actor Richard Burton. The next most popular battle baby name was Ypres with 71.

A Group of chaps, all aged 40, discussed where they should meet for lunch. Finally it was agreed that they would meet at Wetherspoons in Uxbridge because the waitresses had big breasts and wore mini-skirts.

Ten years later, at age 50, the friends once again discussed where they should meet for lunch. Finally it was agreed that they would meet at Wetherspoons in Uxbridge because the waitresses were attractive. The food and service was good and the beer selection was excellent.

Ten years later, at age 60, the friends again discussed where they should meet for lunch. Finally it was agreed that they would meet at Wetherspoons in Uxbridge because there was plenty of parking, they Could dine in peace and quiet with no loud music, and it was good value for money.

Ten years later, at age 70, the friends discussed where they should meet for lunch. Finally it was agreed that they would meet at Wetherspoons in Uxbridge because the restaurant was wheelchair accessible and had a toilet for the disabled.

Ten years later, at age 80, the friends discussed where they should meet for lunch. Finally it was agreed that they would meet at Wetherspoons in Uxbridge because they had never been there before.



Unsurprisingly 15 were called Somme after the 1916 battle in which British and Empire troops suffered 420,000 casualties.

Welfare Report

By Shipmate Norrie Millen



Our President Shipmate looked remarkable well at his 90th birthday bash and it was great to see him surrounded by his family and friends.

It's that time of life, we always seem to have couple of shipmates in the Walking Wounded category and we wish them all a speedy recovery.

I would like to request that you phone email/about any problems/medical issues so that I can, (if you wish) let the other shipmates know in my monthly report. As it stands, by the time I get to give my report, two or three shipmates have already reported shipmates under the weather.

As I mentioned in last issue I am part Volunteer Veteran's Support Group in Kingsteignton. There are other groups in Torbay and South & East Devon. Ivybridge, Budleigh Salterton to name but a few. If you know of anyone that would like some support, either at home or with a group do let me know.

The group supports veterans and serving personnel who suffer from PTSD and associated mental health issues, It is a casual drop in for Coffee/Tea (& small eats) Kingsteignton from 1230 ñ 1400 every Wednesday.

The group in Goodrington are in a temporary home located at

St Georges Church Hall
Barn Road

Goodrington TQ4 6NG

Contact: Norman Williams

nobby47williams@hotmail.co.uk

However, they are hoping to move to a more central location in Torbay area in near future.