



The Rum Tub or Norrie's Nocturnal and Nautical Natter

In this issue

Editorial	1
Because I am a man	2
Real field gun story Part IV	3-4
A fascinating piece of history ...	5-6
RMS Britannic	7-11
VC Recipient remembered	11-12

I DON'T EXERCISE!
It makes my coffee spill.



Law of Mechanical Repair - After your hands become coated with grease, your nose will begin to itch and you'll have to pee.

Law of Gravity - Any tool, nut, bolt, screw, when dropped, will roll to the least accessible place in the universe.

Law of Probability - The probability of being watched, is directly proportional to the stupidity of your act.

Law of Random Numbers - If you dial a wrong number, you never get a busy signal; someone always answers.

Law of the Bath - When the body is fully immersed in water, the telephone will ring.

Law of the Result - When you try to prove to someone that a machine won't work, IT WILL!!

Law of Physical Appearance - If the clothes fit, they're ugly.

Law of Commercial Marketing Strategy - As soon as you find a product that you really like, they will stop making it OR the store will stop selling it!

HMS Ulster

Rum Tub

Volume 5,

Issue 1

February 2016

Editorial

By Shipmate Norrie Millen

Hi! Shipmates,

In answer to my appeal that you acknowledge my emails, especially in regards to the newsletter I received 32 acknowledgements; not bad out of 80 odd in database, certainly better than the usually 7 or 8. For all of you that took the time to respond many thanks indeed. Still a few of you that need to look out and sharpen those quills though!



As we move into another new year and reflect on the past one, we must turn our thoughts to our long-term future. Apart from ships associations such as ours, RNA Branches and indeed Legions are folding all over the country. The prime reason must be that the modern day serviceman does not seem interested in joining these groups. Therefore, as the average age of our members grows higher, the associations and Branches grows smaller until forced to fold. I feel that the main reason is the way we run our events, there is not enough social events to attract the younger prospective member. Maybe if we encouraged our children and grandchildren to join us at our functions and reunions and ensured that there was something to interest them enough to keep returning year after year. We have already seen shipmates attend one, possible two reunions never to be seen again. The faithful few that continue to meet each year miss you guys, so how about meeting up again or indeed for the first time. We always have a lot of fun and laughs.

As a small association or rather group, it is a challenge, as naturally, people some who are still working all week do not normally want to commit to weekend functions. For us 'older' retired members we seem to have even less time these days since we left the work force.

The way I see it anyway!

BECAUSE I'M A MAN

Because I'm a man, when I lock my keys in the car, I will fiddle with a coat hanger long after hypothermia has set in. Calling AA is not an option. I will win.

Because I'm a man, when the car isn't running very well I will pop the hood and stare at the engine as if I know what I'm looking at. If another man shows up, one of us will say to the other, 'I used to be able to fix these things, but now with all these computers and everything, I wouldn't know where to start.' We will then drink a couple of beers and break wind, as a form of Holy Communion.

Because I'm a man, when I catch a cold, I need someone to bring me soup and take care of me while I lie in bed and moan. You're a woman. You never get as sick as I do, so for you, this is no problem.

Because I'm a man, I can be relied upon to purchase basic groceries at the store, like beer, milk or bread. I cannot be expected to find exotic items like 'cumin' or 'tofu.' For all I know, these are the same thing.

Because I'm a man, when one of our appliances stops working, I will insist on taking it apart, despite evidence that this will just cost me twice as much once the repair person gets here and has to put it back together.

Because I'm a man, I must hold the television remote control in my hand while I watch TV. If the thing has been misplaced, I may miss a whole show looking for it though one time I was able to survive by holding a calculator

Because I'm a man, there is no need to ask me what I'm thinking about. The true answer is always either sex, cars, sex, sports or sex. I have to make up something else when you ask, so don't ask.

Because I'm a man, I do not want to visit your mother, or have your mother come visit us, or talk to her when she calls, or think about her any more than I have to. Whatever you got her for Mother's Day is fine.

Because I'm a man, you don't have to ask me if I liked the movie. Chances are, if you're crying at the end of it, I didn't and if you are feeling amorous afterwards then I will certainly at least remember the name and recommend it to others.



Because I'm a man, I think what you're wearing is fine. I thought what you were wearing five minutes ago was fine, too. Either pair of shoes is fine. With the belt or without it, looks fine. Your hair is fine. You look fine. Can we just go now?

Because I'm a man, and this is, after all, the year 2016, I will share equally in the housework. You just do the laundry, the cooking, the cleaning, the vacuuming, and the dishes, and I'll do the rest..... Like wandering around in the garden with a beer wondering what to do.

This has been a public service message for women to better understand men.



The Real Field Gun Story Part IV

Submitted by Ken Jones – HMS Tenby Association – HMS Ulster 1961-63

Kimberly to Bloomfontain, via Paarderberg. Then Pompey for some, Hong Kong for others.

Following the relief of Kimberly, the Naval Brigade in the West learned that they were to swing to the East and follow the advancing army into the Boer heartland.

The pace was hectic and the going very heavy over areas of soft red sand which threw up clouds of choking dust, over rocky obstacles and dry ravines till they reached Waterval Drift, which had steep rocky sides and no easy way across. The Royal Canadian Regiment was tasked to assist and all available drag ropes were used to haul the guns and wagons across by manpower alone.

The Army wagon train which followed them was not so lucky as they were jumped whilst attempting the crossing by Christian De Wet's commando and abandoned to the Boers.

Then followed an exhausting series of forced marches by the Naval Brigade as described by Surgeon Lt. Jeans of *Monarch* who wrote: "In front of the Naval guns, under a white dust cloud were the two batteries, the rumble of wheels and the thud of hooves muffled by the sand, in front of each plodded a bluejacket guide, staggering as if half asleep and yet over and over a left or right hand would come up in order to guide the guns from danger, the little Bushman leader of the ox teams responding to every motion. When a short halt was called the sailors flopped to the ground and slept in their greatcoats until roused to start again. When they finally reached the front line General Roberts told them to advance another ten miles to catch the Boer leader, Cronje, between them and the cavalry who, after entering Kimberly had

hurried on Eastwards and had got ahead of Cronje's force at Paarderberg.

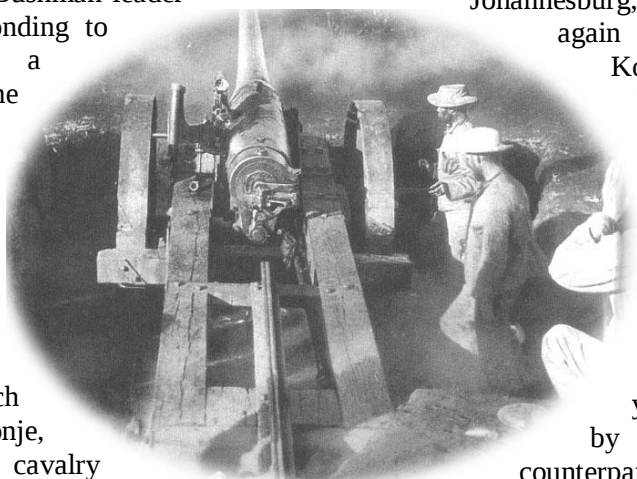
On closing the range to within 3,000 yards, of Cronje's wagon train, but well within sniper range, they proceeded to destroy the Boers wagons aided by an army balloon troop spotter.

Water and food became a problem as the Boers had polluted the river with dead horses and oxen, so during the battle the Stokers foraged for spring water and sheep, which were grazing in the area.

During this time Christian De Wet, having stocked up on the abandoned army wagon train, had followed his ears and joined Cronje's force and a pitched battle ensued which lasted for 3 days with heavy casualties on both sides. This ended with a final infantry advance by the Gordon Highlanders at 3 a.m. And the Boers, finding themselves in a hopeless position, surrendered. Thus ended the battle of Paarderburg.

Following this the Naval Brigade continued on its way Eastward in support of the army in a series of battles cumulating at Bloomfontain.

In Natal Province, after Ladysmith was relieved the *Powerful's* handed their guns over to the Royal Artillery who kept them in place against any further Boer attacks whilst the other Naval Brigade with General Buller's column continued their push Northwards and fought their way up to Johannesburg, before swinging East again and eventually reached Komati Poort, on the Portuguese East African border where remnants of the Boer forces fled to. Some elements of the Naval brigade whose ships were actually on the South African station were to remain in the field for just short of a year before being relieved by their Royal Artillery counterparts and although the Boer War actually dragged on for a further two years,



After the first 11 months it turned into a guerrilla war with the Boers operating in small but effective bands engaged in hit and run tactics. The British and Commonwealth forces resorted to interning the Boer families in the world's first concentration camps in order to stop the Boer bands from being fed and watered at the scattered farms and homesteads by people who were sympathetic to the Boer cause. The army embarked on a programme of setting up and manning strong points at small towns and villages to deter raids. At the end of the day nothing was really achieved for all of the bloodshed.

Powerful's Naval brigade made their way down to Durban by train and received a tremendous reception before embarking and *Powerful* then continued its long delayed passage to Pompey. There they made a triumphal entry and the next day the brigade was landed in No. 1's and marched to the guildhall where they attended a luncheon given by the Lord Mayor of Portsmouth in their honour.

This was not the end of things though as Queen Victoria had taken an almost daily interest in the progress of the various Naval Brigades as this was probably one of the first wars in history to have newspaper correspondents embedded with the various combat units. So three days after the Pompey banquet the 300 men of *Powerful's* brigade, Sailors and Marines were again mustered on the jetty together with their khaki painted long twelve's, and boarded a train in the dockyard which took them to Windsor (travel being so much more efficient in those far off days).

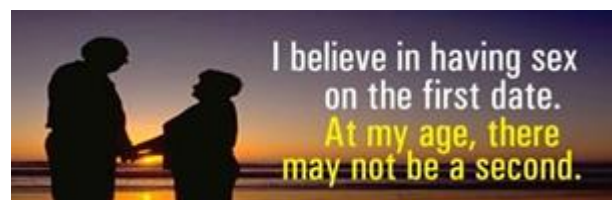
There they formed up and hauled their guns and their wheeled maxim machine gun complete with bullet splattered shield, up the hill to Windsor Castle, where they were inspected by the Queen, and afterwards staged a march past followed by an advance in review order. Then given a speech of appreciation by the Queen this was followed by a substantial dinner in the castle riding school before marching back down the hill and entraining for Pompey.

That was still not the end of things though as 5 days later the brigade travelled to London town where they were fell in and inspected by the First Lord of the Admiralty on Horse Guards Parade before a sell-out crowd who had paid five shillings a seat. Then lunch in the new Admiralty building before forming up and hauling their guns to Trafalgar Square, down Northumberland Avenue to the Embankment, along to Blackfriars Bridge and Queen Victoria Street and into the

City . At the Royal Exchange they paused for refreshments which were provided by Lloyds of London together with specially made cigarette boxes before continuing on down King William Street and over London Bridge to the station, where they were picked up by their special train which had steamed round from Victoria St., to take them back to Pompey.

As for *Terrible*, she had been heading out to the China Station to relieve *Powerful* before being diverted to South Africa and so they in turn handed over their 4.7's to the Royal Artillery, made their way down to Simonstown and embarked. Then *Terrible* made her way Eastwards in a roundabout way, calling at several ports in the Indian Ocean and the Malacca Straits, before heading north to Hong Kong where she assumed the duties of Hong Kong Guard ship.

However, these were turbulent times and the Boxer revolution was brewing, and so before many weeks had passed they found themselves breaking out the 12 pounder field guns. Fitting wheels to the maxims and seeing action in gun mounted junks and ship's boats, also on land, engaging rebel forces and going to the aid the besieged legations in Shanghai, but that as they say is another story.



How Warrant Officers think

A FASCINATING PIECE OF HISTORY FROM WWII

Submitted by Shipmate Mick Dowling – HMS Ulster 1958-60

B-17 "All American"

(414th Squadron, 97th Bomber Group Crew)

Pilot Ken Bragg Jr.
 Co-pilot..... G. Boyd Jr.
 Navigator..... Harry C. Nuessle
 Bombardier Ralph Burbridge
 Engineer Joe C. James
 Radio Operator..... Paul A. Galloway
 Ball Turret Gunner..... Elton Conda
 Waist Gunner Michael Zuk
 Tail Gunner Sam T. Sarpolus
 Ground Crew Chief..... Hank Hyland

In 1943, a mid-air collision on February 1, 1943, between a B-17 and a German fighter over the Tunis dock area, became the subject of one of the most famous photographs of WW II. An enemy fighter attacking a 97th Bomb Group formation went out of control, probably with a wounded pilot, and then continued its crashing descent into the rear of the fuselage of a Flying Fortress named "All American" piloted by Lt. Kendrick R. Bragg, of the 414th Bomb Squadron.

When it struck, the fighter broke apart, but left some pieces in the B-17. The left horizontal stabilizer of the Fortress and left elevator were completely torn away. The two right engines were out and one on the left had a serious oil pump leak. The vertical fin and the rudder had been damaged, the fuselage had been cut almost completely through, connected only at two small parts of the frame, and the



radios, electrical and oxygen systems were damaged. There was also a hole in the top that was over 16-feet long and 4 feet wide at its widest; the split in the fuselage went all the way to the top gunner's turret.

Although the tail actually bounced and swayed in the wind and twisted when the plane turned; and all the control cables

were severed, except one single elevator cable still worked; and the aircraft miraculously still flew!

The tail gunner was trapped because there was no floor connecting the tail to the rest of the plane.

The waist and tail gunners used parts of the German fighter and their own parachute harnesses in an attempt to keep the tail from ripping off and the two sides of the fuselage from splitting apart.

While the crew was trying to keep the bomber from coming apart, the pilot continued his bomb run and released his bombs over the target.

When the bomb bay doors were opened, the wind turbulence was so great that it blew one of the waist gunners into the broken tail section. It took several

minutes and four crew members to pass him ropes from parachutes and haul him back into the forward part of the plane. When they tried to do the same for the tail gunner, the tail began flapping so hard that it began to break off.

The weight of the gunner was adding some stability to the tail section, so he went back to his position.

The turn back toward England had to be very slow to keep the tail from twisting off.

They actually covered almost 70 miles to make the turn home. The bomber was so badly damaged that it was losing altitude and speed and was soon alone in the sky.

For a brief time, two more Me-109 German fighters attacked All American. Despite the extensive damage, all of the machine gunners were able to respond to these attacks and soon drove off the fighters. The two waist gunners stood up with their heads sticking out through the hole in the top of the fuselage to aim and fire their machine guns. The tail gunner had to shoot in short bursts because the recoil was actually causing the plane to turn.

Allied P-51 fighters intercepted All American as it crossed over the Channel and took one of the pictures shown. They also radioed to the base describing that the appendage was waving like a fish tail; and that the plane would not make it and to send out boats to rescue the crew when they bailed out.

The fighters stayed with the Fortress, taking hand signals from Lt. Bragg and relaying them to the base. Lt. Bragg signalled that five parachutes and the spare had been "used" so five of the crew could not bail out. He made the decision that if they could not bail out

safely, then he would stay with the plane to land it.

Two and a half hours after being hit, the aircraft made its final turn to line up with the runway while it was still over 40 miles away. It descended into an emergency landing and a normal roll-out on its landing gear.

When the ambulance pulled alongside, it was waved off because not a single member of the crew had been injured. No one could believe that the aircraft still flew in such a condition.

The Fortress sat placidly until the crew all exited through the door in the fuselage and the tail gunner had climbed down a ladder, at which time the entire rear section of the aircraft collapsed. This old bird had done its job and brought the entire crew home uninjured.

Eds Note: Put you off flying? It would me!



The forgotten sister

Copied from "Ships Monthly" with small additions by the editor Norrie Millen

The ill-fated sister to **Titanic** and **Olympic** and the largest shipping loss of either World War, **RMS Britannic** is often forgotten, despite the interest in her two older sisters. **Campbell McCutcheon** chronicles her all too short history and fate, brought about when she sank barely 55 minutes after hitting a mine in the Aegean.

Why did this article about RMS **Brittanic** literally jump out of the page at me, ideally thumbing through a 2012 edition of 'Ships Monthly' as I waited to have my 'head pointed' at the local barber shop?

The answer is simply this; I was christened on a later RMS **Brittanic**. This was on passage from Mount Abu in Rajpatana, India, after being born at the BMH Hill Sanatorium. I should have been born in Singapore, as my father, a regular soldier with 27 years' service was stationed there.

The Japanese moving rapidly down through Malaya saw my mother narrowly escape, nine months pregnant with me, Dad sadly being captured by the Japanese. By this time, the third RMS **Brittanic** had been commandeered as a troopship. My mother making sure I was well 'blessed' before we arrived in the Atlantic and the dangers of the U-Boat threat, had me christened at the hospital, onboard the **Brittanic** and again in Capetown.

Three White Star Line vessels have held the name **Britannic**. The first and third both had long and successful careers, but the second **Britannic**, the third of the **Olympic** class ships, was never to carry a fare-paying passenger, nor ever make a transatlantic voyage.

The first **Britannic** was built in 1874, remained in company service for almost 30 years and captured the Blue Riband in 1876 with an average speed of 16 knots. Originally, to be named **Hellenic**, she was renamed on the stocks. Her sister **Germanic** was to have an even longer career, being sold to a Turkish company and not being scrapped until 1950, after 75 years of service.

The second **Britannic** was a rather more special ship and held numerous records, some to be proud of, while others marked her down as a

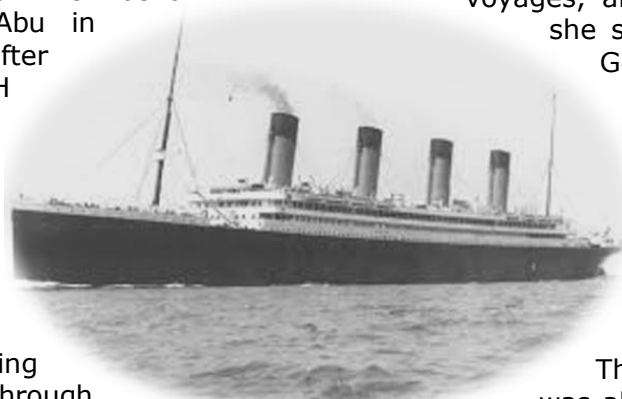
failure for her owners. She was fitted with the world's largest ever-reciprocating steam engines, she never carried a fare-paying passenger, nor did she ever reach New York. **Britannic** was also World War I's largest shipping loss, something even the loss of **Empress of Britain** in World War II did not surpass.

This truly magnificent vessel sailed on only six voyages, all to the Mediterranean, before she succumbed to a mine laid by a German submarine operating out of Pola in the Adriatic. She was the second 'unsinkable' ship to sink, despite a redesign of her hull to accommodate a second skin that was intended to prevent the same sort of fate that **Titanic** met.

The third of three **Britannic's** was almost an afterthought, the third of three White Star leviathans designed to operate a weekly service between Southampton and New York with her sisters **Olympic** and **Titanic**. There is even confusion about her original name, with some orders, such as that with Noah Hingley of Cradley Heath, for her anchor (the largest ever made), listing her as No. 433 **Gigantic**. The name was supposedly changed after the loss of her sister in 1912.

Her two sisters had been built side by side at Queen's Island in Harland & Wolff's Belfast yard, with **Olympic** entering service in June 1911 and **Titanic** in April 1912. Once **Olympic** was launched, her slipway was cleared ready to take the new leviathan. Work was well under way with **Britannic** when **Titanic** hit an iceberg and sank.

Britannic's keel was laid on 30 November 1911 on the slip that **Olympic** had vacated a year earlier after being launched on 20 October 1910. Work ceased almost immediately on Hull No.433 as the outcome of the two enquiries into **Titanic's** loss showed that the system of watertight bulkheads had failed due to poor design, and had in fact pulled the ship deeper and deeper into the icy cold Atlantic. Thomas Andrews, the designer of the three ships, who had sailed as part of Harland & Wolff's guarantee

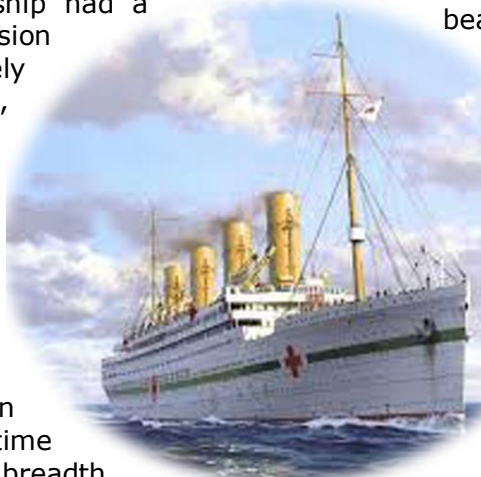


group, and who had been making copious notes on how to improve the third of the class, had died in the sinking, and his tragic death created huge problems for the Belfast yard. **Gigantic** saw her name changed rather quickly to **Britannic**, and her hull was redesigned. The double bottom was deepened from 5ft to 6ft and a double skin extended well above the waterline. Weak areas of the hull were strengthened too. Huge lifeboat davits of a new design, that could each launch as many lifeboats as could be fitted to the ship. These swung the boats so far out from the side of the ship that they could be launched even when the ship had a list. All to giving the illusion that **Britannic** was a hugely improved, and much safer, bigger sister of **Titanic**.

Work progressed slowly, not only due to the redesign the hull being strengthened too. Also the loss of **Titanic** and subsequent loss of revenue after **Olympics'** collision with HMS **Hawke** in September 1911. Sometime before November 1911, her breadth was changed so she would be 18 inches wider than her sisters. War was looming as **Britannic** neared completion.

She was launched at the end of February 1914 into an uncertain future. White Star themselves announced an entry into service in spring 1915, and the publicity machine began to extol the virtues of the newest addition to the company's fleet. She was not even the largest ship afloat when she was launched, an honour that had already passed to Hamburg Amerika's **Imperator**, but White Star would ensure she was the most luxurious, as **Olympic** and **Titanic** had been before her. Her First class accommodation was the first to offer toilets in almost every cabin, with only the most basic of first class cabins on D and E Decks having communal facilities.

By February 1914, Britain was preparing for war, and shipbuilding materials were being diverted to ships of war and cargo shipping, leaving few available to complete **Britannic**. Gradually, as spring turned into summer, workmen were diverted to vessels of more pressing importance. In August 1914, war was declared and work ceased, leaving many of the interior spaces of **Britannic** unfinished and empty.



The Western Front had become a stalemate, and the war had become a global conflict. German and Austro Hungarian's ally Turkey was set to enter the war. Turkish control of the narrow straits the Dardanelles prevented the supplying of the Russian arm in the Black Sea area and it was decided to invade them and seize control. On 25 April 1915, British, Empire and French troops landed at Gallipoli.

It was the start of an ill-fated campaign that resulted in the loss of over 70,000 Allied and 20,000 Turkish soldiers. Casualty rates were horrendous as the Allies were tied down the beaches, with little hope of defeating the Turks. It meant that some of the biggest liners in the world were needed as troopships and hospital ships.

After a few months of toing and froing between White Star and the Admiralty, **Britannic** was requisitioned on 13 November 1915. Work began in earnest to fit her out as a hospital ship. Her empty decks were thronged with workmen rushing to complete her. Medical supplies were ordered, her public rooms were fitted out as wards and operating theatres. Many of the fixtures and fittings intended for her were placed into storage for the duration and she was painted an all-over white, with green stripe and three huge red crosses along her sides, and other red crosses that could be lit at night on her promenade deck.

Lifeboats fitted

Only five of the revolutionary new lifeboat davits had been fitted, and standard Welin davits were hurriedly added to bring her lifeboat complement up to 55. Stacks of Linklater floats were arranged anywhere there was space on the boat deck. She would, after all, be capable of carrying a crew, doctors and nurses and wounded soldiers and would need capacity for 4,473 people, representing 3,309 casualties, 675 crew and 489 medical staff.

On the evening of 11 December 1915 **Britannic** sailed from Belfast for Liverpool, where, ten days later, provisioned and staffed, she set sail on her maiden voyage to Naples. Her captain was Charles Bartlett, who had overseen construction of **Titanic** and **Britannic**. Arriving in Naples on 28 December 1915, she was coaled and sailed for Mudros, where she got up to full speed for the first time.

With more powerful engines, she was slightly faster than her sisters, with a top speed of 24 knots. On her arrival at Mudros on New Year's Day, the job of transferring 3,300 patients to her began. They came from Gallipoli in smaller hospital ships and were loaded aboard **Britannic**, which sailed for England on 3 January, arriving at Southampton for the first time on 9 January.

After unloading her passengers into waiting hospital trains, which took them all over southern England, she was provisioned again and prepared for her next voyage, which commenced on 20 January 1916. Instead of sailing for Mudros, this time she went to Naples and loaded about 2,200 sick and wounded there, leaving on 4 February.

The campaign in the Dardanelles settled down and there was little need for such a large ship on the service, so **Britannic** was laid up in Southampton until mid-March. On 20 March she sailed again for Naples, coaling there then proceeding to Augusta, where the injured were transferred to her and she set sail for Southampton again, completing her third successful voyage on 4 April 1916.

Laid up off Cowes after her third voyage, **Britannic** was released back to White Star on 6 June. However, barely 11 weeks after her return to Belfast, she was called back up again on 28 August 1916. The reasons for the lowering of numbers of casualties from February was the evacuation of the Dardanelles after the aborted invasion, but then the Salonika front opened up.

Casualty numbers were huge, and big hospital ships were required again. Captain Bartlett again took command and took **Britannic** to Cowes. For a fortnight preparations took place for her next voyage.

Outward bound she carried Voluntary Aid Detachment nurses and medical supplies. Setting sail on 24 September 1916, she was once more enroute to Naples. On 1 October she made the voyage to Mudros, the Allied base in the Aegean. Arriving there on 3 October, she loaded over 3,300 wounded soldiers, leaving again on 5

October. By 11 October she was back in Southampton, unloading the soldiers onto waiting hospital trains.

On 13 October the Royal Army Medical Corp requested that **Britannic** be used to transfer personnel and supplies to the front yet again. On 20 October she was ready to sail, and five days later she was in Naples, where she remained for a day and a half. On her arrival in Mudros on 28

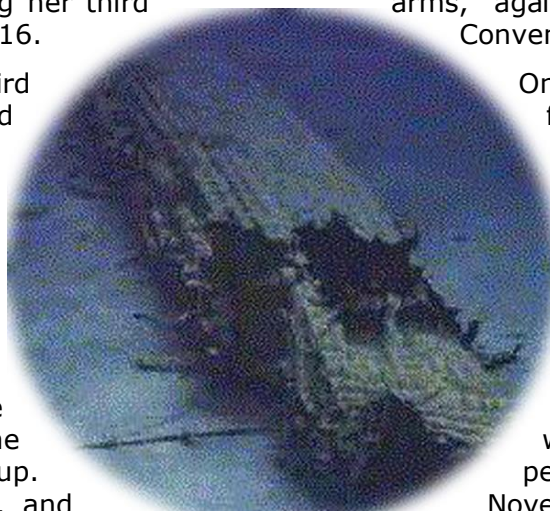
October, the task of loading her passengers began again. Distributed into wards, some men were walking wounded and could wander the ship. The fully-functioning hospital was well used, but the carrying of an Austrian wounded soldier created huge problems for the British Government.

Adalbert Messany was ill with tuberculosis and, although he had been a prisoner since the start of the war, the decision had been made to repatriate him.

Messany was aboard **Britannic** as she was still unloading her medical supplies and RAMC personnel, and wrongly assumed they were British soldiers, which **Britannic** could not, under international law, carry. Messany also noted that some of the British wounded still carried side arms, again a breach of the Geneva Convention.

On 30 October **Britannic** sailed for home, her crew and passengers unaware of the diplomatic **incident** that would engulf the British in January 1917, after Messany returned to Austria. Of course, by then **Britannic** would be gone, sunk in the Aegean, thankfully without a cargo of wounded. Completing her penultimate voyage on 6

November, she was prepared again for what would be her final voyage. On this was Violet Jessop, who had been a stewardess aboard **Olympic** when she was rammed by **Hawke**, was rescued from **Titanic** as she sank and was now on the last of the Olympic class vessels as a VAD nurse. HMHS **Aquitania** had been damaged in a storm, and so **Britannic** was readied in record time for her next voyage to Mudros. It took six days to prepare her and she sailed once more on 12 November.



Delayed departure

With no passengers, the medical staff had the run of the ship, and on 17 November, the vessel was in Naples once more. A huge storm delayed departure and **Britannic** finally left Naples late on 18 November. On 21 November **Britannic** was in the Aegean, less than a day from Mudros. It was 0800 and the medical staff were enjoying breakfast as the ship cruised at 20 knots. The ship's crew were changing shifts and the watertight doors were open. At 0812, a roar was heard and the ship shuddered as if she had hit something.

A huge hole had appeared between cargo holds 2 and 3 and the ship began to take in huge quantities of water. There had been no wake from a torpedo and **Britannic** was a hospital ship, so no U-boat Captain would have dared try to sink her. **Britannic** had been mined. An indiscriminate mine left by a U-boat out of Pola had caused the demise of White Star's finest.

Nevertheless, **Britannic** had seen many safety features built into her, so what had happened to cause her to sink? It seems that, as the mine had struck so close to a shift change, some of the watertight doors were still open. From the forepeak to cargo hold 3 the water was pouring in and the damage had caused **Britannic's** watertight doors to jam open. In addition, against regulations, many portholes were open in the heat and, with six watertight compartments letting in water, the ship was doomed. An SOS was sent, and HMS **Scourge** responded within three minutes of the collision. **Britannic** was already settling heavily by the bow and it was obvious she had not long to live. As other ships began to sail to her aid, Bartlett ordered the lifeboats ready for launching, while simultaneously trying to sail **Britannic** for the shallow shores of the island of Kea. The island was a mere two miles away and the engines were brought up to full speed, but the result of this vain effort to save the ship was to fill her more rapidly with water. Fifteen minutes after the explosion, **Britannic's** bow was almost under water and she was listing badly to starboard. Her E-deck portholes were submerged, despite once having been 20ft above the waterline. Water poured through the open portholes as the crew and medical staff prepared to abandon ship.

She was still under way as the first boats hit the water, and one boat was dragged into the still-turning portside propeller. It churned up the lifeboat, turning it to matchwood, while causing horrific injuries to the poor passengers. A second

lifeboat met the same fate, luckily all aboard, except for Violet Jessop, jumping into the water well before the churning propeller. She jumped into the water and was dragged down, rising to the surface and fracturing her skull on a piece of wreckage. She floated in a sea of red, among severed limbs and smashed timbers.

A third boat had a lucky escape, as Bartlett ordered the engines stopped, the crew being able to push themselves clear of the bronze blades. One of the new davits failed to work, but the others proved their worth as the remaining passengers and crew left the ship. At 0900, the last lifeboat left the ship. Twenty-eight had left, along with the two motorboats, and the captain and officers jumped off the starboard bridge wing as it reached the water. A couple of stragglers left just after this, and Bartlett floated in the water watching his command sink.

Bottom of the ocean

In a depth of only 400 ft of water, the ship's bow struck the sand and she pirouetted as she settled. Her funnels collapsed as she rolled onto her starboard side. 55 minutes after being mortally wounded, **Britannic** was gone forever. The largest shipping loss of either world war had gone to the bottom. 1,032 of those on board were saved, with the motorboats picking up those floating in the warm waters off Kea.

So, on her sixth voyage, **Britannic** was no more. She never served on the three-ship, weekly transatlantic service envisaged by Bruce Ismay and Lord Pirrie back in 1907, nor would she ever sail to New York. Instead, **Britannic** has spent much of the past 97 years as a footnote to the history of **Titanic** and **Olympic**.

Discovered again in the 1970's by Jacques Cousteau, the wreck of **Britannic** is in excellent condition and is now owned by the author Simon Mills. There have been plans to turn her into an underwater museum, but for now, she remains in 400 feet of crystal-clear water, a reminder of the futility of war. Thankfully, her death saw only 30 casualties, but if she had hit the mine on the return voyage, the story would have been much more tragic, with the loss of hundreds if not thousands, of wounded soldiers, nurses and doctors.

Had **Britannic** survived, she would have been one of the most luxurious ships afloat for much of the 1920's. Instead, some of her fittings went to **Olympic** during her 1919 refit, while others were sold off, some surviving in a Belfast pub. Now, all that remain are a few wooden panels, some furniture and the majestic wreck.

BUILT Harland & Wolff, build Number 433

CAREER	Laid down 20.11.1911, launched 26.2.1914, requisitioned 13.11.1915 as hospital ship, maiden voyage from Belfast to Liverpool 11.12.1915, sunk by mine 21.11.1916 on outward leg of sixth voyage, Captain Charles A. Bartlett
DIMENSIONS	882ft 9in x 94ft x draught 34ft 7in
TONNAGE	48,158 grt, 53,000 tons displacement
ENGINES	24 Double-ended boilers, five single-ended boilers two four-cylinder triple expansion steam engines of 16,000hp each, one turbine producing 18,000hp; two triple-bladed bronze propellers outboard and one four-bladed central propeller
SPEED	21 knots cruising, 24 knots maximum
CREW	Crew 675, medical staff 489, wounded 3,309

Zeebrugge Raid VC Recipient Remembered

A **MEMORIAL** dedicated to Able Seaman Albert McKenzie VC was unveiled in Bermondsey, South London, on 23 October 2015, writes Paul Kendall. Standing on the junction of Tower Bridge Road, Bermondsey Street and Decima Street, close to where McKenzie was born and where the Decima Street Boys Club was founded, of which McKenzie was a member, the emotive statute was dedicated in the presence of Admiral Lord West. McKenzie's great nephew, Colin McKenzie, and local dignitaries.

Albert McKenzie was the first London sailor to be awarded the Victoria Cross, in his case for his role in storming the Mole at Zeebrugge on St. Georges Day, 23 April 1918. The objective of the operation was to block German submarines and torpedo boats gaining access to the English Channel from their base eight miles inland at Bruges. Approximately a third of all merchant vessels sunk during the First World War were by German vessels based at Bruges and if they were not stopped it was feared that Britain would be starved into submission. The intention was to sink a number of obsolete Royal Navy ships in the

entrance to the Bruges canal.

Able Seaman McKenzie was one of the men landed from HMS *Vindictive*, their aim being to attack and neutralize the battery at the end of the harbour arm, or Mole. This as well as creating a diversion to ensure that three obsolete cruisers were able to pass the Mole to enter the harbour where they could be scuttled at the entrance to the canal. McKenzie's actions were recorded in *The London Gazette*: 'On the night of the operation he landed on the Mole with his machine-gun in

the face of great difficulties, and did very good work, using his gun to the utmost advantage. He advanced down the Mole with Lieut. Comdr. Harrison, who with most of his party was killed, and accounted for several of the enemy running from a shelter to a destroyer alongside the Mole. This very gallant seaman was severely wounded whilst working his gun in an exposed position.'

McKenzie sustained shrapnel wounds to his back and a smashed foot. When the retirement was sounded McKenzie had to be carried by Leading Seaman William Childs up a ladder on to the Mole parapet from where he crawled on his hands and knees to HMS *Vindictive*.



McKenzie was awarded the Victoria Cross following a ballot of his comrades who thought that he was worthy of the honour to represent the ratings from the Royal Navy who participated in the operation. He briefly left Chatham Royal Naval Hospital to receive the VC from King George V at Buckingham Palace. After succumbing to septic poisoning from his injury to his foot McKenzie died from influenza on 3 November 1918. Aged 20, he was buried at Camberwell (Forest Hill) Cemetery, London.



A Royal Navy guard of honour was also present when the memorial was unveiled at noon on the day that marked Able Seaman Albert McKenzie's 117th birthday. At the same time, HMS *Belfast*, berthed in the River Thames within a mile of the statue, fired a gun salute in his honour.

The memorial itself consists of a concrete plinth, which was made from a small section of the Zeebrugge Mole generously donated by the people of West Flanders. A rail is attached to the plinth and represents the Mole parapet. At the top of the plinth stands an iron sculpture of McKenzie armed with a Lewis gun.

Eds Note: RNA Torbay Branch, as a Millennium Project had a memorial stone commissioned placed on Roundham Head in Torbay to recognize and commemorate Lieutenant Arthur Harrison VC from Torquay who led AB McKenzie's team and who sadly died during the raid on Zeebrugge aged 32 years on 23rd April 1918.



Lt.Cdr Harrison



Roundham Head Memorial



Ostend Memorial

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".

