

WORCESTER'S WENT TO WAR

World War TWO

By
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Chapter One. 1939 and 1940

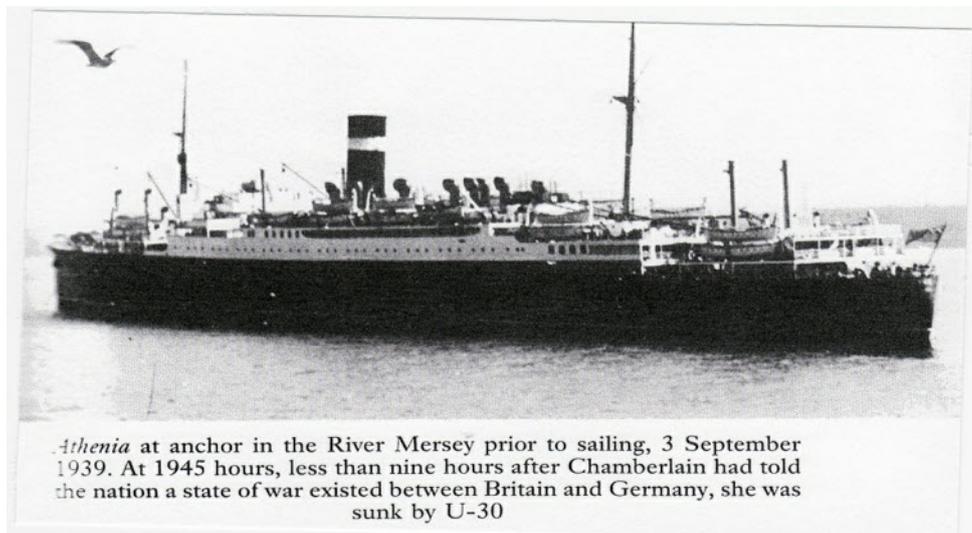
To those of you who were born 65 years ago (1945) World War II is somewhat academic, but the previous 6 years had a tremendous effect on your lives.

The training ship HMS **Worcester** was to provide a large quantity of cadets (Though not from the actual ship during the war, but from Footscray Place ashore), who fought in that war all over the globe, from North Russian convoys, the Atlantic, North and South, to the Mediterranean and the Indian and Pacific Oceans.

Of the 1907 cadets that left HMS **Worcester**, over the period 1920 to 1945, **537** ex-cadets joined the Royal Navy in its various colours, that is RN 23%, RNR 58%, RNVR 9%, RCN 4%, RIN 2% with a few joining the RAN, RNZN And the Royal Marines, and **38** of them were killed in action.

On land **128** ex-cadets joined the Army, with **two** KIA, the Airforce attracted **145** ex-cadets, of whom **10** died in action. While 20% of cadets remained at sea in the Merchant Navy, with **144** of them perishing at sea or in bombing raids on harbours in the UK and overseas.

As it was in World War I, Great Britain suffered two disasters at the beginning of the conflict, the sinking of the *Athenia* on the first day, 3rd September 1939 didn't help either which was the start of the longest battle, the Battle of the Atlantic which lasted until May 1945, 1933 days.



Athenia at anchor in the River Mersey prior to sailing, 3 September 1939. At 1945 hours, less than nine hours after Chamberlain had told the nation a state of war existed between Britain and Germany, she was sunk by U-30

By the end of September 1939, Allied and Neutral ship losses were 33 amounting to 85,000 grt. In October the battleship **HMS Royal Oak** was sunk at anchor in Scapa Flow by the German U-Boat ace LDCR Prien in **U47**. 27% of the world tonnage, that is 6843 ships were flying the Red Ensign.

The first convoy was assembled, and OB4 (Outward bound) sailed from Liverpool, and is the first to be attacked by U-Boats on 16th September 1939.

In June 1940 all Holiday camps were banned within 10 miles of the East and SE coast of England, and the German Luftwaffe bombed Eire in county Wexford killing 3 girls!

The first large disaster, now largely forgotten, were the two battles of Narvik only a few days apart in April 1940 in which although the German Naval surface forces took a battering with 10 destroyers and one submarine (nearly half their surface fleet) destroyed along with a number of supply vessels, the aircraft carrier *HMS Glorious* and her two escorting destroyers *HMS Acasta* and *Ardent* are sunk after the evacuation of Norway with the loss of 1474 lives, by the two German battle cruisers *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau*. Our OW representatives here were CMDR York Mcleod Cleaves (1912) DSO, DSC, RN in command of a group of minesweeper trawlers and in the air LCDR John Casson (1926) OBE, MiD RN shot down while flying his Swordfish biplane in an attack on the German ships, he ended up in Stalag Luft III and was a part of the planning team for the "Great Escape" in 1944, and the code master for MI9 while a POW. Another OW was LEUT (A) Rupert Lisburn Groyne Davies (1934) RN who also ended up in Stalag Luft III shot down while minelaying with his Fairey Swordfish, later becoming well known on Television as Maigret the Belgian detective.

Shades of the Wooden Horse of Troy; the Germans sent a battalion of infantry hidden in a merchant ship into Copenhagen, then on the 9th April 1940 when they emerged to seize the Danish King and Government with a fire fight around the port. Which led on to a German amphibious landing on Norwegian soil because Hitler had become convinced that it was essential to take control of Norwegian waters to enable safe passage of his ships and those bringing iron ore from Sweden as well as giving access to the Atlantic for the Kriegsmarine and to support Finland who were fighting the Russians.

The "Battle of Britain" was raging overhead of Kent and the home counties, but at sea, in the English Channel and the Southern North Sea, the RN was shelling every port between Antwerp and Cherbourg without any losses, the Germans had assembled thousand of barges to transport their troops across the Channel. But to do this they needed to have superiority in the air and on the sea and this they did not have. The RN with their bombardment, destroyed far more barges than the Airforce with their bombing of the ports where the barges were being assembled. The part that the RN and the Merchant Navy played, at that time and for much longer was the Battle **FOR** Britain, not the Battle **of** Britain.

"Careless talk Cost Lives", a propaganda slogan on billboards and in the papers, there was in fact a true example of this. The U-Boat U632, discovered in conversation with the single survivor of the tanker Cordelia, that behind his convoy HX224, was the slow convoy SC118 of 64 ships. 16 U-Boats were gathered to attack, in February, north of the latitude 50° N; 13 ships were sunk including the specialist rescue vessel, 3 U-Boats were sunk and 4 severely damaged, U632 did not take part, she was later sunk by a VLR Liberator west of Rockall.

Merchant seaman who became POW's became incarcerated in Marlag Nord near Bremen in northern Germany. It is not generally remembered that when a Merchant ship was sunk, the crew had their pay stopped from that moment, until they signed on another ship! This was the legal interpretation of the "articles of Agreement" between the Master and each crew member. In commercial law a sinking or abandonment terminated that particular voyage. In due course, some many months later, the survivor would receive a pay slip on that basis. Later it was agreed to pay survivors for one month or until returned to the UK, which ever was longer, any additional expense to be shared between ship owner and the government. After the establishment of the Merchant Navy Pool in 1941, a survivor would receive wages while waiting to 'sign on' his next ship.

In the Battle of the Atlantic, OW's were involved on Warships, Submarines, Aircraft and of course all types of Merchant Ships, Passenger/Troop ships, Tankers, General Cargo, Tugs and Trawlers to name but a few.

There quite a number who never made it home, some but not all are remembered on a plaque at Tower Hill, London where 24,000 names are recorded.

Meanwhile in the halls of the Admiralty a CMDR N. Holbrook VC RN of World War One submarine fame – there is a town in New South Wales name after him, plus a full size replica of a 1960 70 “O” boat submarine. He became the head of the Casualty Department, with the task of interviewing survivors of torpedoing, bombing, mining or other enemy attack, with the object of improving survival at sea. Prior to 1939 ships lifeboats were usually made of timber, clinker built and very little resources were put into them for survival. In 1940, out of 160,000 seafarers employed in British flagged ships, only 40% had been on courses to defend their ships or crews.

An edict in 1940 said all ships voyaging through danger zones must carry liferafts, and all new ships be provided with a motor lifeboat, later in the war all tankers had to have one motor lifeboat.

As the war progressed, ships lifeboats became made of steel, weighing around 7 tons, they had bilge hand rails, semi-rotary bilge pumps, Horlicks milk tablets, and special chocolate made by Fry and Rowntree, while Bovril made pemmican (not universally disliked!) the British, American and German had different versions of this product; softer biscuits were included. They were to be sealed in rust proof material and small sized containers and a fishing line and hooks. The 1950's survival stores were much, much less than this! Blue Funnel also provided prunes, raisins, and peanuts in their lifeboats on instruction by Mr. Holt himself.

At the outbreak of war, Gieves the well known Naval Tailors offered for £3.3.0 an inflatable vest, said to be capable of supporting 5 persons, it could be worn at all times without restricting movement, which was the major criticism of the standard lifejacket, though that changed from cork to kapok and had a whistle and light attached, much as is used today.

The biggest disaster on the Allied side was in May/June 1940, with the withdrawal of 385,000 troops from France mostly at Dunkirk but not all. Here again we had OW's in the thick of it.

On 27th May to 4th June 1940 with 340,00 British Army and 40,000 French and Polish soldiers were plucked from off the beach by 860 assorted vessels, 693 British, 168 French, Polish, Belgian, and Dutch vessels, from ships lifeboats sent from Merchant Ships loading or discharging in the London docks to large Destroyers and Ferries.

Worcester ex-cadets were heavily involved in the Armada of craft and 8 were rewarded for their efforts. One was Midshipman Malcolm John Ball (1938) who won a DSC while serving in **HMS Scimitar** and later a posthumous MiD when he was killed on **MTB218** when attacking a German convoy nearly exactly two years later.

It is sometimes forgotten that it was not only that troops were rescued from Dunkirk, but they were also pick up from Le Havre, Cherbourg, and St. Nazaire and even further into the Bay of Biscay.

It was here that the Cunard ship **Lancastria** was bombed while at anchor off the port of St. Nazaire, sinking with appalling loss of life, the greatest number ever lost on a single British flagged ship, the number being estimated at 2850, but because no one knew how many people were actually on board at the time. Here an OW came to the rescue, the Captain of the **Oronsay** also rescuing refugees and troops; Captain Arthur Edward Nicholls (1904) OBE MN, saved a good proportion of those who were actually saved.

The organisation to recover all these men and refugees from France came under the umbrella of Operation Dynamo, mastermind by Admiral Sir Bertram Ramsay, recalled from retirement in 1939 to act as Flag Officer Dover, he went on to organise Operation Torch (North Africa landings); Operation Husky (Sicily landings) Operation Neptune his 'piece de resistance' the Normandy landings, unfortunately he was killed in an air crash when on duty in January 1945.

The Channel Islands were occupied by the Germans on 30th June 1940 (70 years ago), the only part of the British Empire to come under day to day control by the Nazis.

There were some 388 honours and awards made to ex Worcester cadets, from 1939 to 1946, there often being quite a time lag between the actual action that promoted the citation in the first place and the gazetting of the award. I shall not reel off all those gallant gentlemen, but a random selection as we go along.

In 1939 the German Navy had converted some merchant ships into commerce raiders, and at the outbreak of war 9 put to sea, the most successful being the **Atlantis** who sunk or captured 22 ships on her voyages. In 2 ½ years these raiders sank 130 ships

A long time after the war, the general public, through the media, learnt about Bletchley Park in Buckinghamshire, where supposedly all German signals were scrutinized and the staff there attempted to de-crypt them. Initially they were able to break the Luftwaffe enigma codes, the naval codes were harder, this was eventually achieved with a number of papers and code books plus equipment taken from the German trawler **Krebs**, the German weather ship **Munchen, U110**, then another weather ship **Lauenburg** and the **U570**, plus input from the Polish resources. It is estimated that the decoded signals to U-boats saved at least 5000 merchant seamen's and DEMS Gunner's lives.

The DEMS Gunners (Defensively Equipped Merchant Ships) came from the RN, the Army and some from the Royal Marines, they basically had obsolete weapons on most ships and had to use volunteer from the ships crews to make up the numbers to operate the ordnance. – One ex-galley boy to this day 70 years on remembers sitting behind an open sight getting ready to fire!, even by March 1944 only 4500 ships had been armed.

On convoy HX84 (Halifax fast) which was attacked by the German capital ship **Admiral Scheer**, three ex-cadets, who had only recently left the 'Ship', died on the **HMS Jervis Bay** an AMC, they were MIDN Walter Ernest Thisleton (1939) RNR, MIDN Robert Frank Owens (1939) RN, MIDN Clive Telford Latch (1939)RNR as well as Cadet Frank Brian Symonds (1939) on the Canadian Pacific ship **Beaverford**, both ships being sunk in November 1940. Six merchant ships of Convoy HX84 were destroyed by the German ship, but 32 ships were able to gain the UK thanks to the **Jervis Bay**. In the same convoy was an Eagle Shipping Co. Tanker called the **San Demetrio** which was torpedoed and set on fire and abandoned. The Second Officer Arthur Godfrey Norton Hawkins (1931) OBE MN along with the Chief Engineer re-boarded her, spent three days putting out the fires and then without a serviceable navigating bridge structure and only a stump of a steering wheel navigated back to the UK 10 days after being left to sink. The ship was repaired and sailed again but was lost later in the war; 2/O Hawkins died in 1980 he was a Trinity House Pilot out of Harwich after the war.

Out in the Pacific, two German raiders, the **Komet** and the **Orion** attacked the **Rangitane** and sank her, in November 1940, her Captain was Captain Herbert Lionel Upton (1903) DSC , Commendation, Legion of Honour (France) the first and last were from World War I. The survivors, men women and children spent another six months at sea on two German supply ships before being interned after landing at Bordeaux.

In 1940 the commanding officer of HMS **Hibiscus** a Flower class corvette was CMDR Charles George Cuthbertson (1922) DSC MiD* RNR, it is thought that he was the role model that Nicholas Monserrat used for CMDR George Erikson RNR in the novel "Cruel Sea". The "Flower class" corvettes were named after flowers in an English garden, a total of 262 were built and 33 were lost, based on a whale catcher, they were quick and cheap to produce at £120,000 each.

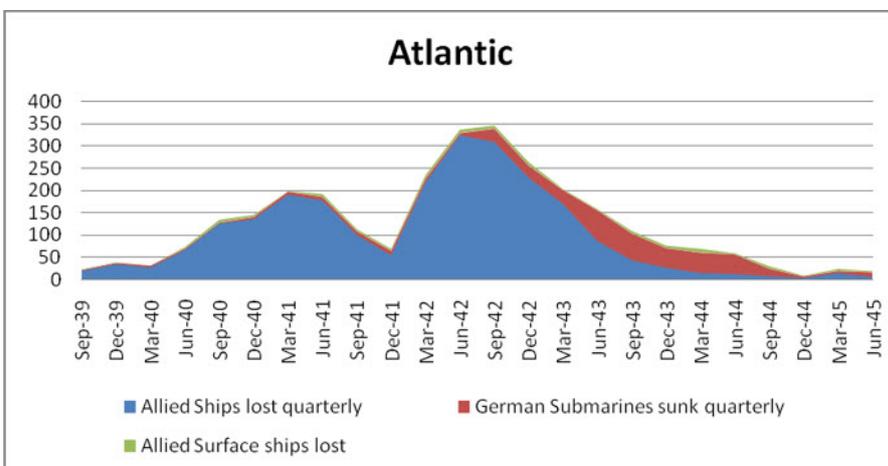
Chapter 2 1941 - 1942

Merchant Ship degaussing was not started until March 1941 by which time a number of ships had succumbed to the magnetic mines sowed by the Germans in North European waters.

HMS Seal a "Porpoise" minelaying submarine is captured by the Germans and eventually became the **UB** as a German submarine, the Allies also did something similar with **U570**, which became **HMS Graph** which ran aground in March 1944 on Islay Island and abandoned.

The next setback was the loss of **HMS Hood** in the North Atlantic, sunk by the **Bismarck** and **Prinz Eugen** in May 1941, there being only 3 survivors, but three days later the **Bismarck** met the same fate.

The German U-boats would have claimed even further lives and ships, but between 1940 and 1941 their torpedoes were very unreliable and it took over two months to overcome this problem. The winter of 1940 to 1941 was also the worst weather ever experienced in the Atlantic which although rough on men and ships, prevented many attacks on the



convoys crossing the Atlantic. Then in the spring of 1941 warships began to be fitted with Radar and with the sinking of **U47** (Prien), **U99** (Kretschmer), and **U100** (Schepke) as early as March 1941 a fifth of the current fighting strength, those that followed were not as experienced or so well trained. **U110** commanded by Fritz-Julius Lemp, who sank the **Athenia** on the first day of the war, was captured and gave up some of the secrets of the Enigma coding machine and code books.

The Germans broke the RN Basic Administrative Code in 1939 and was reading 50% of all Naval communications!

Slow Convoy SC7 in October 1940 was grossly inadequately protected with only HMS Scarborough for 75% of the voyage and 20 out of 36 merchant ships were lost (55%); U99, Otto Kretschmer sank 7 of those ships.

One of the Worcester's more famous sons was LEUT John Niven Angus Low (1927)GC RN, who was the X/O of **HMS Unity**, along with ABSMN Miller ensured that all of the ships company escaped the damaged and sunken submarine, when she was in collision with the Norwegian cargo ship **Alte Jarl**, they were the only two who did not escape and were both initially awarded the Empire Gallantry Medal, later changed to the George Cross. Incidentally the Navigating Officer on the **HMS Unity** at the time and who survived is Captain George Hunt DSO*, DSC*, MiD* RN an ex-Conway cadet now in his nineties and lives in Brisbane.

It was always felt that during World War I that Merchant Navy personnel were not recognised sufficiently in the giving of honours and awards. This time the Merchant Navy were in it from day one, the day the **Athenia** was sunk.

In November 1941, a MN lapel badge was issued to all Merchant Seaman in lieu of a uniform!! Ships losses were then 69% to U-Boats, 14% to aircraft, 7% to mines and 4% to surface raiders (not a good return on the cost of a battleship!) the remaining losses due to groundings or weather stress.

During the Battle of Britain, when the Blitz was at its worst, three OW's who were not seafarers, but one a District Officer with the London Fire Brigade, Mr. Ronald William Greene (1925) MBE was awarded a MBE for his efforts during the Blitz; and Constable Albert William Gorton (1915) GM of the Metropolitan Police was the only OW to receive the George Medal for saving the life of a woman in a badly damaged house with an unexploded bomb still inside the house. Private Henry Ogden (1933) MM and a Commendation for his brave conduct in the Civil Defence of London.

The Suez Canal which was vital in enabling the British efforts in North Africa to fight Rommel's armies, was closed on several occasions when the Germans dropped mines into the canal.

Of ex-cadets who went into the RAF, 7% went into the Marine Craft section of the RAF manning the air rescue fast boats, on the other hand it should also be pointed out that there were 7 in number court martials out of those joining the grey/blue cloth, most of them Pilot Officers!!

OW's had a liking for serving in Submarines, 16 all told in WWII and quite a few were KIA in the Mediterranean. 73 were named as working on escort ships in the North Atlantic, 15 became involved in the landings in Sicily and a further 25 in Operation Neptune off the Normandy coast.

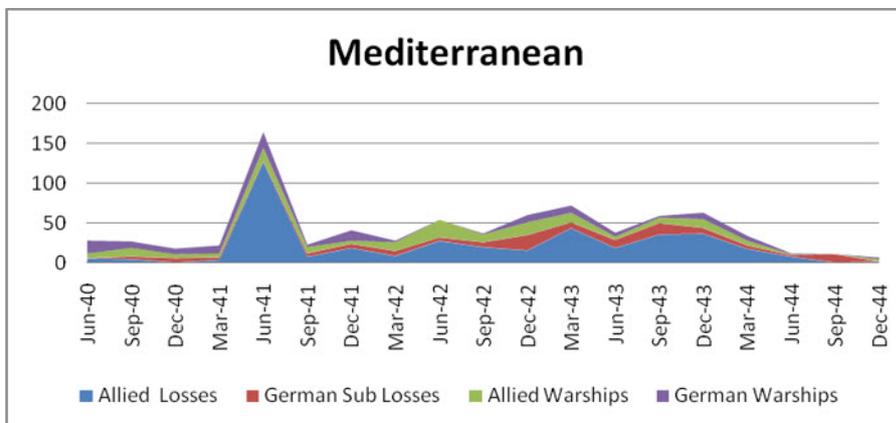
The greatest number of ex-cadets who volunteered for the armed services, strangely enough was in 1930 and 1931, when over half the leaving cadets took the "Kings Shilling", this was at the height of the Great Depression, and only 47 cadets left in 1931.

The largest Allied Merchant Ship to be sunk in WWII was the Empress of Britian at 42,348 grt on 28th October 1940.

In November 1940 in the Mediterranean the Allies had a win! Admiral Cunningham with a force of Battleships, cruisers and the Aircraft Carrier **HMS Illustrious** attacked the Italian fleet at Taranto where all 6 Italian battleships were at anchor or moored, the attacking Swordfish sank three and damaged a fourth so badly it was never re-commissioned.

9 British Hospital ships were sunk in WWII and CAPT William Pace (1902)

OBE, MN was Master of Llandovey Castle, a Hospital ship operating principally along the coast of East Africa and the Mediterranean, she carried 38,000 wounded personnel and in spite of her Red Cross markings suffered 7 enemy attacks.



Cyril Thompson of the shipbuilding firm Thompson in Sunderland on the North East of England was summoned to London to the Admiralty and informed that the country was going to send him over to America, in September 1940. This was the start of the Liberty Ship programme, that eventually defeated the U-Boats and won the Battle of the Atlantic. Liberty ships were an amalgamation of three designs, one of them being the **Dorrington Court**. After agreement had been reached in America to commence building these ship, basically a British Design with some modifications, Mr Thompson left the USA by sea and was torpedoed on his way back to England spent time in an open lifeboat clutching the documents to himself until rescued. Sometime later in the war he offered himself for service in the RN and was turned down, so he joined the RAF as an airman 2nd class, saw service in Italy as a Flight Sergeant and eventually commissioned. But his work on the plans and the production of Liberty Ships saved Great Britain and he could be truly called the father of Liberty Ships. (The three designs were to the Thompson ship **Embassage** class between 1935 – 1939 The **Dorrington Court** and the **Empire Liberty**, with some alterations by the American shipyards. The **Empire Liberty** the first British ship, was sunk by U557 on her maiden voyage August 1941

Eventually there were 18 shipyards building Liberty ships in America on the East coast, Gulf and West coasts of America, 5 of them run by Kaiser. The UK by the end of the war had 182 delivered to 64 British Shipping companies, including such names as P&O, Cunard, Orient Line, Blue Funnel, Blue Star, Port Line, Union Castle, Clan Line, and Hains to name just a few. All of them had the launching names changed to **SAM******* when they sailed und under the Red Ensign.

Other countries also were given, under the Lend Lease programme, some of the 2710 Liberty Ships that were built, 43 went to Russia, Greece and Norway 13 each, Belgium 7, China 4 and the Dutch only 2. There were also 5 special ones designated as Naval Repair ships, 2 becoming RN and 3 USN. At the same time in Canada they built "**Fort**" ships and after they had run out of "**Fort**" names they were "**Park**" ships. In the UK the name started with "**Empire**....." The late Captain Kenneth Alfred Hugo Cummins (1918) was the eldest Captain of any Liberty ship, he died in 2006 aged 106 after an active career in P&O.

At the beginning of 1941, there are still ships proceeding alone in the Atlantic and Indian Ocean, with the result that they are either sunk by German raiders, German Surface elements of their surface fleet or by U-Boats. And German aircraft, in just two months 271 ships are sent to the bottom, and there was worse to come One of the OW Submariners LCDR Cecil Bernard Crouch (1927)DSO** RN. While the Commanding Officer of HMS Thunderbolt operating in the Mediterranean, he was KIA in 1943.

The Mediterranean saw many of the Royal Navies submarines lost there in the following years. CAM Ships are introduced with modified hurricanes flying off on a one way trip, the success of these led to the conversion and construction of Escort Carriers. The first one HMS Audacity was from a converted German prize, captured in March 1940, a cargo liner Hannover, renamed Sinbad, then Empire Audacity converted in January 1941 to become HMS Audacity, with convoy OC\G74 her Marlet fighters shoot down the first Kondor to fall victim to an Escort Carrier. She was unfortunately lost on 12.12.41 her crew consisted of RN officers and key technicians, but the seaman and engineroom staff were civilians signed on under T124X* articles.

A German U-Boat sinks the Egyptian flagged passenger ship in the Atlantic, with 200 Americans onboard on 19th May 1941, well before Pearl Harbour.

By 1941 the food rationing in the UK was down to:-

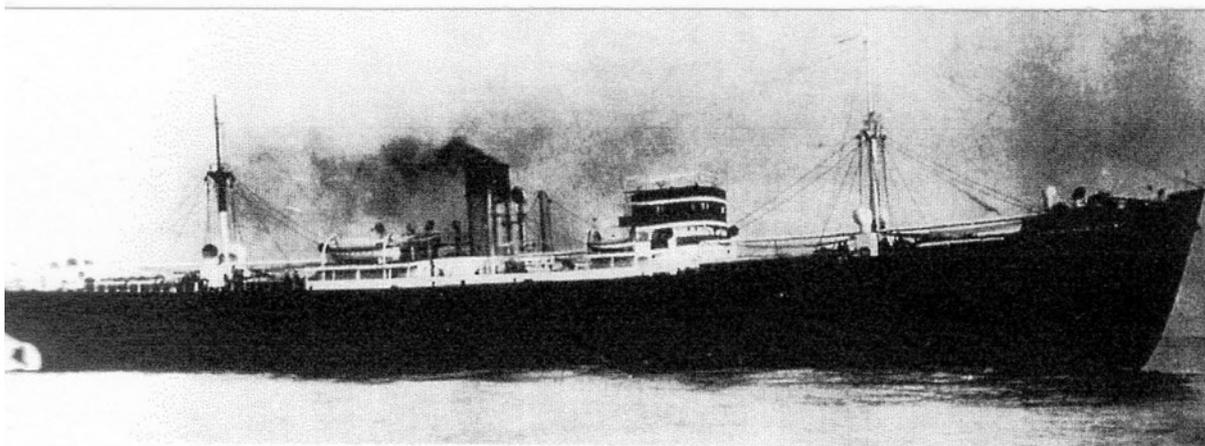
4 oz butter: 2 oz of preserves; 2 oz of Tea; 1 oz of cheese; 12 oz of sugar and Meat to the value of 1 shilling and ten pence. (SPAM – Supply Pressed American Meat) Per person!

In January 1941 the major stocks of food in the UK were down to:-

Wheat 15 weeks..... Meat 2 weeks..... Butter 8 weeks

Margarine 3 weeks..... Bacon 27 weeks..... And no imports of Fruit

And by late 1942 Great Britain had only 6 weeks foodstuffs for the whole nation.



Dorrington Court, the second prototype, launched in 1939. (Newcastle Museum)

Back out in the Atlantic the ss **Gairsoppa** was torpedoed, 3 boats got away, one under the command of 2/O Richard Hamilton Ayres (1927) MBE, MN, it set out with 35 men, but after 13 days he was the only survivor, when they finally sighted land they were too weak to use the oars, so the lifeboat was washed in towards the beach, but overturned in the breakers near the Lizard, three men survived this, but it was overturned a second time and helpers on the shore assisted the 2/O who was unconscious

the others last seen on a rock. The 2/O also was awarded a Lloyds Bronze Gallantry Medal as well as his MBE.

In the withdrawal from Crete in May 1941, LEUT Philip Frederick Cole (1931) DSC, MiD RN, who whilst serving on HMS Orient lost a leg, and later was the RN's Philatelic Officer located at the Fleet Air Arm Museum Yeovilton for 13 years.

The Battle of Cape Matapan, which was a resounding success against the Italian fleet, here again OW's stood up to be counted, SBLT (A) Grainger Patrick Carlisle Williams (1936) DSC RN flying off **HMS Formidable** against the Italian **Vittorio Veneto** Battleship, she escapes but 4 other ships are sunk and the **Pola** later. During 1941, the RN keeps supplies of aircraft, Hurricanes, to Malta flying them off **HMS Ark Royal** on a number of trips.

Around this time the boffins had dreaming up schemes to protect the merchant ships, some were successful and some not so good; for instance the anti-torpedo nets, which only protected about 70% of the ships length, they had also the effect of slowing a ship down when under weigh, and were not much good at speeds under 7 knots and over 15 knots. Then there was the Mark 29, a rubber hose which surrounded the ship with explosive to a depth of 10 feet, controlled from the bridge to go off when a torpedo struck it! A Holman Projector, a "Pig Trough", Pillar Box, Harvey Projector, PAC and FAM all these were rocket devices, mainly because of the shortage of ships guns for Merchant ships, and they were mostly devised to bring down attacking enemy aircraft.

Butterfield life rafts were standardised to 15 feet by 8 feet, double sided with a sharp end fore and aft to enable steering, side screens, storage lockers, a mast and yard, oars and rowlocks, and to be able to stand a free fall from 30 feet above the sea.

Cabin doors on ships were to have "Kick out" panels and their cabin port holes of sufficient diameter that a body could get through to escape. The fog buoy which was towed behind the ship, producing a plume of water that the officer of the watch could see, was designed by a 2nd Officer especially for convoy work and is still used today.

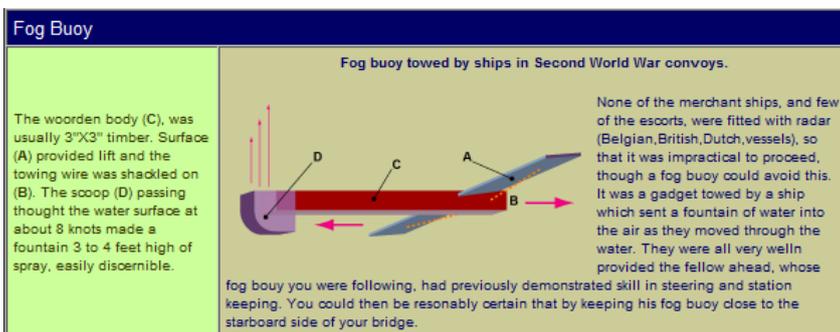
Towards the end of 1941, ship losses in the N. Atlantic had reduced, partial because of more escorts being available, better air cover (but not yet all the way across) the introduction of Radar and HF/DF, as well as the Germans pulling

aircraft resources from that arena to the German invasion of Russia. The weather in the North Atlantic at this time recorded gale force winds on 53 days from January to March, this caused quite a lot of damage, but did keep the U-boats down, though they did get some of the stragglers. The U-boats were increasing by 20 a month, and U-Boat losses were only 2 a month.

In November 1941 the German raider **Atlantis**, whilst replenishing **U126** is surprised by the cruiser HMS **Devonshire**, the German ship had cost the Allies 11 ships in the time she had been operating. German Kondor aircraft sank more tonnage than U-Boats in April 1941. But along came the 50 **CAM** (Catapult Aircraft Merchant) ship in 1941 with a Hurricane on a catapult, followed by **MAC** ships (Merchant Aircraft Carriers) with 3 to 5 Swordfish aircraft under the Red Ensign also carrying their normal cargo, albeit not the full load of grain or oil the former were Ben Line ships and the later a mixture of British Tankers and Anglo-Saxon ships. By 1943 there were Escort Carriers. The maximum number of ships in any one Atlantic Convoy was 167 ships.

I have seen somewhere but cannot confirm it, that Load Lines were adjusted during the war so that ships were more deeply laden.

At the close of the year 1299 allied ships had been lost in all theatres of the war. CMDRE Sir Roy Gill (1902) KBE, CBE, MiD, RD RNR was on the **Glenpark** on the Atlantic convoy HX133 out of Halifax



to the UK which arrived safely in June 1941. The Suez Canal was closed in 1941 for 20 consecutive days by German aircraft flying over the desert and laying mines along the canal.

Chapter 3 1942 - 1943

In North Africa Major Ronald John Findlay (1919) MC* won his first Military Cross, adding to it later in Italy, and Captain George Victor Legassick (1921) DSC RNR whilst in command of **HMS *Saladin***, he was later to become, after the war, the Captain Superintendent of the "**General Botha**" the training establishment in South Africa, but was later sacked by a minister of the South African Government because he couldn't speak Afrikaans!

The ship mv ***Opana*** was torpedoed at night in an Atlantic gale, the master with the assistance of Apprentice Peter Frank Luard (1939) BEM was awarded this for his efforts in the lifeboat over 6 days. The Americans are now fully committed to war, but still don't require ships to be in convoys for protection, when proceeding along the eastern seaboard of America, and the U-boats have a second "Happy Time" sinking ships in and around the Caribbean.

In March 1942 the raid on St. Nazaire took place and an OW, LEUT Edward Alfred Burt (1930) was awarded a DSC for his action over the two days it took place, in command of ML 362, on Operation Chariot. Admirall Dönitz in 1942 despatched a total of 62 U-boats into the Mediterranean, none ever came out again!

In April 1942, the Kriegsmarine had an outrageously successful "Channel Dash", when their surface ships, ***Gneisenau***, ***Scharnhorst***, ***Prinz Eugen*** and 6 destroyers, 14 torpedo boats, 26 Schnellboots left Brest for the run to Wilhelmshaven, getting 300 miles into the voyage before being detected being unsuccessfully engaged by the Dover coastal batteries, and a swordfish attack in which 42 aircraft were lost. A sea borne naval attack by 5 RN destroyers took place off the Dutch coast, where HMS ***Worcester*** a Harwich based destroyer was badly damaged by two 11 inch shell strikes later taking a further 9 hits and had to be towed into Harwich and was never fully repaired before the end of the war.

The Flower Class corvette HMS *Orchis* is seen on Atlantic convoy duty. The 'Flowers' accounted for more than fifty German and Italian submarines, in some cases participating with other naval ships in the sinking, either in a primary role or a supporting one. (From a painting by T.F.J. Rogers)



Brazil enter the war on the side of the Allies in August 1942 after U-Boat activity had sunk 5 Brazilian ships, although their warships stayed south of the equator, they did allow Allied ships to use their ports and facilities.

Convoys were being assembled and despatched from Scotland and Iceland across the top of the world to Murmansk – which was very close to the Russian/Norwegian border, only fifty miles from a German controlled airfield! – or Archangel much further east – Now comes the infamous convoy PQ17 which was disbanded or, to be exact told to scatter off the North Cape, with no support from the escorting ships, though this is not exactly the whole truth. The Luftwaffe and the U-boats, between them sank 21 ships out of 34 ships leaving Iceland, mainly American cargo ships, however the escorts were British, and commanding the close escorts on HMS Keppel was CMDR Broome RN. On the 4th July at 2215 hrs the convoy was told to scatter, because the Admiralty thought that the German surface ships Tirpitz, Admiral Scheer, and Hipper with 6 Destroyer escorts had sailed from Alten Fjord in northern Norway, but they didn't sail until pm on the 5th July and returned to their safe anchorage by 2130hrs on the 5th July. The Russian convoys supplied the Russian army and air force a tremendous amount of material and food, from the UK alone went 5218 tanks – Churchill tanks were made by Vauxhalls – 4343 trucks, and 7413 aircraft, £8 million of food, £45 million of machine tools and £5 million of medical supplies.

The Americans sent 14,795 aircraft, 7537 tanks, 51,503 Jeeps, \$US 1.3 Billion of food and 15 million pairs of Boots!, this was a cost of 18 warships, 104 merchant ships 829 men of the Royal Navy and Merchant Navy, on the other side of the ledger 31 U-Boats were sunk and 93% of cargo shipped to Russia arrived, compared to 96% which safely arrived via the Persian Gulf, and 99% in via Vladivostock. In July the infamous "Russian Convoy PQ17" took place with ex-cadets heavily involved, either in the Merchant Ships or the warships. LCDR Vivian Dickinson Hamlin Bidwell (1915) DSC* RN was part of the escort serving aboard **HMS La Malduine**. Also LEUT Harry John Hall (1925) DSO, DSC* RNR, as the senior corvette escort HMS **Stayner** on that convoy. Later in command of, HMS **Lotus** in Operation Torch, sinking a U-Boat. The summer convoys went west of Iceland, through the Denmark Strait, with the winter route east of the Faeroes, south of Bear Island to Murmansk/ Kola inlet and in the summer to Archangel.

When the Japanese advanced to the West and South, taking Hong Kong and then Singapore, the **Dominion Monarch** was in drydock in Singapore, only the efforts of the ships company under the direction of the Chief Engineer managed to reassemble her engines so that she could escape to New Zealand.

In the Battle of Bay of Bengal, Japanese aircraft and submarines devastated merchant shipping from Calcutta to Colombo, bombing Colombo harbour on Easter Sunday 1942 and in December 1942 they bomb Calcutta. The tanker **British Judge** was undergoing repairs having been bombed and machine gunned in the Sunda Straits. She managed to sail and made for Mombasa where she lay for nine months before sailing for Durban, then Capetown, on to Brazil and finally Mobile in Texas to be drydocked for repairs having made a 20,000 mile journey for the repairs.

The Germans had earmarked Madagascar as a U-Boat base in Vichy French Diego Suarez, and urged the Japanese to set up a base on the Island. However the Allies set up the largest amphibious force since the Dardenelles, with the Allies invading the Island and taking over in just 48 hours. 2/O Robert Henry Pape (1921) on the **Winchester Castle** and CMDR John Pomer Sommervale (1930) RN were both Mentioned in Despatches for their part in Operation Ironclad.

HMT **Langibby Castle** was torpedoed by U402 in June 1942, in the Atlantic with 26 killed although not sunk, she commenced a voyage of 3,400 nautical miles without a rudder or stern, through SW'y gales, no escort and managed to make 9 knots, fighting off a Kondor aircraft en-route limping into Gibraltar to be patched up and send off to the Clyde still without a rudder and was later at Operation Torch in North Africa, Operation Husky (Sicily) and Operation Neptune (Normandy) where she was a LSI ('Elsie') with units of the Canadian Third Infantry Division and Royal Naval and Royal Marines the handle the LCA's onto Juno beach.

On the home front in 1942 a Mr Irvine Le Mesurier Croll (1903) MBE was awarded a MBE for being the Manager of the Southampton Employment Exchange. Mind you this is possibly because he convinced a number of young merchant seaman to join the RN, this did happen according to my ex-Galley Boy mentioned earlier, which is how he ended up on the Escort Carrier HMS **Biter** as a 'Jack Dusty'!

The HMT **Llandaff Castle** a little later in the year was not so lucky being torpedoed and breaking in two, but all survivors being rescued in 3 days, Captain Cornwallis Jasper Clutterbuck (1920) OBE MN for his courage and excellent judgement, and also Third Officer Creighton Earle Causley Windram (1936) a Commendation.

In September and November 1942 the Axis had a bit of their own medicine, when the German raider **Stier** and the American cargo ship **Stephen Hopkins** had a shoot out which caused the German ship to be abandoned the American sinking later, while the Dutch tanker **Ondina** and the RINS Bengal, a minesweeper fought the Japanese raider **Hokoku Maru** which blew up, the other two ships though damaged made port safely.

The P&O ship ss **Strathallan** was torpedoed and sunk by U562 in December 1942, on board were 4000 British and American troops and 250 QA Nurses also were 5 OW's ranging from the Captain,

John Henry Biggs (1899)CBE MN who received the CBE, his Chief Officer John Cavendish William Last (1916) an OBE, then cadet Robert Thomas St Clair Mckibbin (1940) the BEM, and John Frank Wachter (1942) a Commendation as well as Henry Richard Wade (1940); both Last and Wachter became Commodore of P&O.



Rhexenor's fourth mate taken prisoner by U-217 was landed at Brest where he was interrogated before being sent to Milag Nord POW camp near Bremen

On another P&O Troopship the **Strathmore** was CAPT Joseph Kennedy Chaplin (1902) CBE, ADC, RNR who must have thought here we go again, since he had been present as a junior officer in WWI at the Battles of Dogger Bank, Heligoland and Jutland!

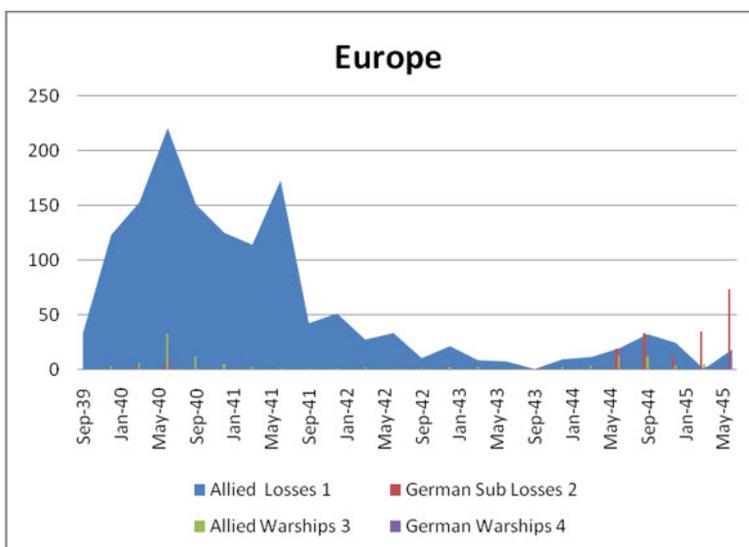
Clan Line was badly hit during WWII, losing 27 ships of the 46 she had in 1939 and 79% of the ships crews did not survive of those 27 ships.

Short Sunderland flying boats, of which 739 were built and used by Coastal Command to patrol the sea lanes of the Atlantic, flying out of Pembroke in Wales, Iceland, Northern Ireland and some time the Azores, they were supported by a very versatile American aircraft, the Catalina PBY some 3920 were built and used world-wide, it could be configured as a bomber, torpedo carrier, and used as a convoy escort, on anti-submarine or air-sea rescue duties.

Although the German Navy had designed and in 1935 built one aircraft carrier named the **Graf Zeppelin**, but it was never completed, partly because Herman Goering would not allow anyone to have a say in what aircraft could be used and built. The ship was scuttled in 1945. The forgotten sector of the German Navy was the Schnellboot (E-Boats) waged a continuous and sometimes successful war right up to 1945.

During August and September 1942, U-boats located 21 out of 63 convoys, seven were attacked and 43 merchant ships sunk, and by November there were 200 operational U-boats along with a further 170 on trials and training. U-Boats were sinking merchant ships at twice the rate that the combined British, Canadian and American output of new ships.

The evacuation of Greece with 22 Merchant ships over six days under continuous air attack, some 50,000 men were rescued some on HMS Defender with CMDR Gilbert Lescombe Farnfield (1925) DSO, DSC, RN and in command of HNS Qe LCDR Thomas Keith Garrad (1909) DSC, OBE, RNR assisting in this evacuation. At the end of 1942 in the New Years Honours, RADM Sir Oswald Henry Dawson (1898) was knighted, spending many sleepless nights as a convoy commodore on Ocean voyages.



Chapter 4 1943 - 1944

On 23rd February 1943, sixty one ships sailed from New York to be met by 40 U-Boats, the battle raged for 5 days over some 600+ nautical miles, 12 ships were sunk in atrocious weather and the loss of lives was heavy. At this point the loss of ships and men was extremely critical, however by the end of March 1943, with some 525 ships in convoys across the Atlantic and there were 44 U-Boats looking for them; there was a change in the tactical scene , with extra aircraft, some from shore bases and the introduction

of Escort Carriers, the USS **Boque** and HMS **Biter**, the upshot was 22 U-boats sunk but only 20 ships were lost. Grand Admiral Dönitz by the end of May 1943 conceded that Germany had lost the Battle of the Atlantic.

In March 1943, the loss of ships and men, in the North Atlantic and around the globe reached its apogee with more ships being lost than were being built.

Rescue Ships;- 29 were requisitioned from ships owners including all 11 vessels of Clyde Shipping Co, 6 from GSNC, and two the **Zamalek** and **Zafaran** of the Egyptian Pharonic Mail Line!, most were short sea vessels, now attempting Atlantic or voyages to Russia.

The turning point of WWII from the Allies point of view was around April/May 1943. The Russians get the Germans to surrender Stalingrad, the British 8th Army win at El Alamein, Americans win the Battle of Midway, and The Battle of the Atlantic, though not over is now going more the way of the convoys than the U-Boats. VLR aircraft were making a difference in the Bay of Biscay and landing rights had been negotiated with neutral Portugal for an airbase in the Azores. The more sophisticated equipment being used by the Allies was making a difference, with centimetre Radar, Hedgehog missile throwers, improvements in ASDIC (SONAR), HF/DF (Huff Duff), Bletchley Park, more Escort vessels and Escort Carriers.

For example Convoy ONS5 in May 1943 was attacked by 50 – 60 U-Boats, but by the end of May 1943 41 U-Boats were lost in one month, and 140 “Liberty” ships a month were being launched. Tobruk in North Africa, by the end of the war had 70 vessels of all types laying on the harbour bottom, 33 showing some of their superstructure above water. LEUT Robert Arthur Neville Cox (1935) DSC, MiD RNR was killed while minesweeping the harbour and under air attack, later KIA; as was SLBT John Easton Niels Carter (1937) MiD RNR.

Tobruk had to be supplied by sea to keep Rommel’s army at bay, one of the smaller ships that did this was the ss Penschurst, which during 8 months was constantly attacked by aircraft and submarines, but held them all off, shooting down 2 aircraft and damaging another, with no casualties, Captain James Grant (1906) MN was awarded the OBE for this show of courage and leadership.

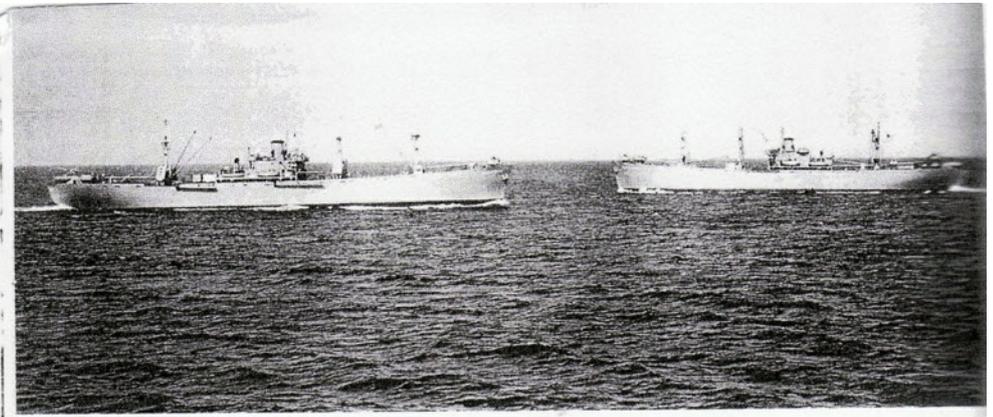
Operation Harpoon was the convoy prior to Operation Pedestal which unfortunately was unsuccessful, but 3/0 Montague Patrick Kingston Fyrth (1928) on board the tanker ss **Kentucky** a sister ship to the ss **Ohio** was awarded a Commendation for his part in trying to gain Malta.

Later in 1942 was the Operation Pedestal, aka WS215 the Malta convoy that was so desperately required with much needed supplies, and fuel. Here there were a number of OW’s involved in the 14 fast Merchant Ships, 3 Aircraft Carriers, 2 Battleships, 4 Cruisers, 14 Destroyers and a decoy convoy from Alexandria. Apprentice Albert Godfrey Allson (1942) DCM MN on the **Clan Ferguson**, torpedoed, he set about saving crew from his ship in the water, was captured by an Italian flyingboat and became a POW, it is estimated that 12 OW’s were involved either on merchant ships or RN fleet ships and in the air above the convoy, another was C/O Rex Ansell White (1933) DSC MN on the **Brisbane Star** after she had been hit by an aerial torpedo and had her bows blown off, she made Malta by going astern at 5 knots!

Whilst in the Mediterranean, the Malta convoys from Alexandria had the Glen Line ship HMS **Breconshire**, commanded by a RN officer and flew the White Ensign with a T124X* crew was sunk 8 miles short of Valetta harbour, and LCDR George Onslow Graham (1936) DSC*, MBE, MiD* RN who later served in the RNZN and loaned to the Malaysian Navy.
(*T124X or T124 “Articles of Agreement” – “pledging themselves to serve under Naval Command”.)

The record for building a “Liberty” ship went to the Kaiser plant in California from keel laying to delivery was 8 days, she was launched 4 days 5 ½ hours after the keel was laid the **Robert E Peary**. The British prefix SAM? Called after Uncle Sam! These were on Bareboat Charters to the Ministry of War Transport,

who then allocated them to British Shipping Companies. Those with an "**Ocean**" prefix, of which 60 came to the UK were less standardised than the Liberty ships, there were also 354 "**Fort**" and "**Park**" ships from Canadian ship yards of which 31 were sunk, and 77 "Empire" ships lost.



The meeting of the two surviving Liberty ships, *Jeremiah O'Brien* (left) and *John W. Brown* (right) off Cape Cod on 16 August 1994.

Operation Torch took place on 8th November 1942 with the first of the Allies massive amphibious landings of World

War II. With simultaneous landings at Casablanca, Oran and Algiers, there were 521 ships taking part and 67% being Merchant ships of one sort or another and 64% coming from Great Britain, further down the track it required 106 merchant ships to support this endeavour. This cause Hitler to occupy the remainder of France and capture the French fleet, they are too late, the French scuttled, 3 Battleships, 7 cruisers, 30 destroyers, 16 submarines and many smaller vessels. Eventually General Montgomery's 8th Army and General Eisenhowers forces meet up and expel Rommel's troops and capture 150,000 German and Italians including 9 generals. King George VI remarked, "The debt of Dunkirk has been repaid"!

One of the more unusual cargoes carried by "Liberty" ships was from America to India, 63,204 Mules for use in the Jungle in Burma, not on the same ship, were 6657 camels, 10924 horses and 64 husky dogs.

In April 1943 the "Man that never was" a Major Martin RM body was deliberately wash up on Spanish soil with papers that suggested that the next Allied objective was to be freeing Greece from the German Yoke. In October 1943 a repatriation of 790 wounded POW's from Germany to Britain!, and some no doubt going the other way.

Between 1940 and 1944 there were 100+ British Submarines in the Mediterranean giving an operational strength of 35 on patrol at any time. While of the 820 operational U-Boats 718 were destroyed in action, and the life expectancy of a submariner was only 50 days. While Kondor aircraft sank more tonnage than U-boats in April 1941, and this is also true of U-boat kills, more U-Boats overall sunk by either aircraft operating at sea off ships or VLR aircraft operating out of shore bases. The greatest size of any convoy was 167 ships.

In July 1943 The Allies had an even larger amphibious landing operation, Operation Husky, this time on the southern coast of Sicily, the Americans under General Patton with 66,000 troops and the British under General Montgomery with 115,000 British and Canadian troops and all told 2730 vessels from 6 RN Battleships to 930 little TLC's; Tank Landing Craft who rapidly changed their name to Landing Craft Tank. Along with the Monitor HMS Erebus where CMDR Hadress Waller D'Arcy-Evans (1915) RN was Mentioned in Despatches. Operation Husky produced 4 OW's with MiD's one DSC and one KIA. Leut Edward Trenchard Green-Kelly (1930)DSC RN who was killed in action with MTB655. Meanwhile in the air SQDNLDR Peter Godfrey Powell (1934)RAF whose unerring skill in navigation on heavy raids to Peenemunde and Berlin earned him a DSO.

Chapter 5 1944 -1945

The Salerno landings, called Operation Avalanche on mainland Italy were not quite as heavily supported by ships as Operation Husky, in the main, OW's were in Landing Craft (Various) LEUT George Robert Hogg (1921)MiD RNR, and later in Operation Shingle at Anzio, LCDR Oscar Henry Carew Mid RNR

had LST 361 along with 4 other OW's involved with LST's either at sea or at their bases in Messina or Ancona.

In August 1944 saw 2 LCDR RNR and one LEUT RNR involved in "Special Operations" this usually meant taking personnel into or away from enemy held territory, LCDR Thomas Hewitt Maxted (1937) DSO, RNR (He landed Odette Churchill) LCDR Michael Patterson Salmond (1937) DSC, RNR in 15th MGB Flotilla, and LEUT Francis William Milton Cosens (1935) DSC, RNR in MTB's in the Mediterranean. Meanwhile, because **Worcester** had involvement in Canada at Halifax and the **BIG** explosion in WWI, half the world away in Bombay we had two OW's being at the WWII **BIG** explosion when the Fort Stikine went up alongside the docks, they were SBLT Benedict Marian Lobo (1937) Commendation RINR, and LCDR George Pebbles Frazier (1930) RIN also was awarded a Commendation for action in this horrendous explosion. (There was also a horrific explosion in Bari as well but more damage and lives were affected in the Bombay explosion.)

Out in the Atlantic LCDR Sidney Richard James Woods (1923) DSC, MiD, RNR in command of HMS **Wren**, destroyed **U473**, he was to command 6 RN ships by the end of the war, before returning to command in Clan Line.

Air Marshal Stephen Charles Trafford (1917) CB, CBE, DFC RAF, the DFC was gained in WWI, and the Companion of Bath for organisation of aircraft at the Normandy landings.

Shades of one of Worcester's long time hero's Admiral "Teddy" Evans and his "Evans of the Broke" scenario. CAPT John Richards Barnes (1924) DSO, MiD* RN, while in HMS Ashanti in an action with two German Destroyers Z1 (Leberecht Maas) and Z32, the first he sank, and the second left a blazing wreck, he later became a silversmith with his own hallmark, registered at Goldsmiths Hall. From 1944 onwards the Allies a special type of convoy, called "Greyhound" convoys these were 14 knot, all tanker, convoys to move oil products from the Caribbean and East Coast of America Stanlow and Avonmouth to be piped to Hamble and Fawley, 11 convoys of an average 19 ships in each. It was estimated that 4 large (16,000 tons) tankers per day were needed to keep Great Britain going back in 1942.

The build up of men and material on the British Isles started at the end of 1943 and the south of England, especially around the ports became a vast military camp getting ready for the push across the Channel. The maritime portion of this was Operation Neptune.

Before the ships and landing craft could land, the beaches had to be surveyed for obstacles and explosive devices and that's where LCDR Paul Wilson Clark (1928) DSC* RN surveying the beaches and minesweeping undertaken by CMDR Antony Hubert Gleedon Storrs DSC* and Admirals Commendation RCNR; (later RADM); CMDR John Pollington Apps (1913) DSC, MiD* RN; CMDR Lionel Geoffrey Lyne (1934) DSC, OBE, MiD, RN; LCDR Charles Donald Callieu (1928) DSC, OBE RNVR; LCDR Edward Alfred Burnham (1939) MiD RNR; LEUT Frank Measham Berncastle (1928) DSC*, MID* RN; before the LST, LCI and the Mulberry harbours could even approach the coast of Normandy.

This WAS the greatest amphibious landing ever with a grand total of 4.798 vessels involved from 6 Battleships, 23 cruisers, 135 destroyers among that number.

The 400 units of the two Mulberry Harbours required 160 tugs for towing them into position and a further 59 old merchant ships and warships to be sunk as blockships.

Into all this activity came OW's on all sorts of craft, quite a few commanding LST's as well as on various supporting ships protecting the invasion from German interference. Two that get a mention are CAPT John Gerald Beveridge Oates (1923) DSC, MN in command of the Cable ship Alert, and LEUT Bernard George Griffiths (1931) MiD of HMS Sancroft who assisted in laying the "Pluto" pipeline, and after the Armistice, Captain Walter Croston Dillon (1907) as the Master of the John W Mackay for laying this pipeline, was recognised with an OBE. This underwater pipeline did not really meet the needs of the task meeting only 8% of the demand, and "CHANTS" were brought in. (Churchill's Holy Answer to the

Nazi Terror) these were small coastal tankers which moved the necessary fuel to the beaches, and followed the advance through the liberated French and Belgium ports, there was also a second pipeline called "Dumbo" across a more narrow part of the Channel from Dungeness to Boulogne.

Not long after D-Day, a great storm blew up from the North East and wrecked the more eastern Mulberry Harbour off "Omaha" beach. This lasted for 4 days and was considered the worst for 40 years. The main problem at sea off the beaches was ships being mined, with German small craft coming in under the cover of darkness and laying varying types of mines. 11 Allied ships were lost to them by the end of June 1944.

Ashore, SGT Peter Mitchell (1929) in the Army Air Corps won a DCM and LCDR Ronald John Murray (1934) DSC, RNVR part of assault group J2, and LTCOL Charles Ronald Cowan (1928) OBE in the ROAC, Major Morris Arthur Grace (1930) Royal Engineers won a military MBE for gallantry at the Normandy landings.

These are only a few that in some way took part in either Operations Neptune or Overlord, all together I calculated about 32+ OW's were recognised for their involvement plus quite a few that took part but didn't get any recognition for their efforts.

In August 1944 Operation Anvil was to be the simultaneous landing on the southern shores of France, this didn't happen and the Operation was renamed to become Operation Dragoon, the landings being spread over the mainland between Toulon and Cannes, and a fourth on outlying islands a grand total 897 major warships and 1300 small assault landing craft, with 9 Escort carriers standing offshore to supply superior air power. Two OW's became involved LCDR John Kenneth Shaw Downham (1926) MiD RNR for the planning of the Operation and LEUT Lionel Thomas Hancher Johnson (1939) RNR also a MiD for taking part. There were a number of ex-cadets on the large number of Landing Craft involved.

By January 1945, a U-Boat that attacks an Allied ship virtually signs her own death warrant, 4 found this to their own cost when operating around the British Isles in the last week of the month. In this month attacks by British aircraft carriers on oil installations at Palembang Sumatra where LCDR John Charles Nicholas Shrubsole (1932) DSC, MiD RN, both flying off the deck of HMS **Victorious** attached to the British Pacific Fleet. As well LCDR Stephen Fraser Forbes Shotton (1935) DSC, RNR flying off HMS **Indomitable** in Operation Meridean.

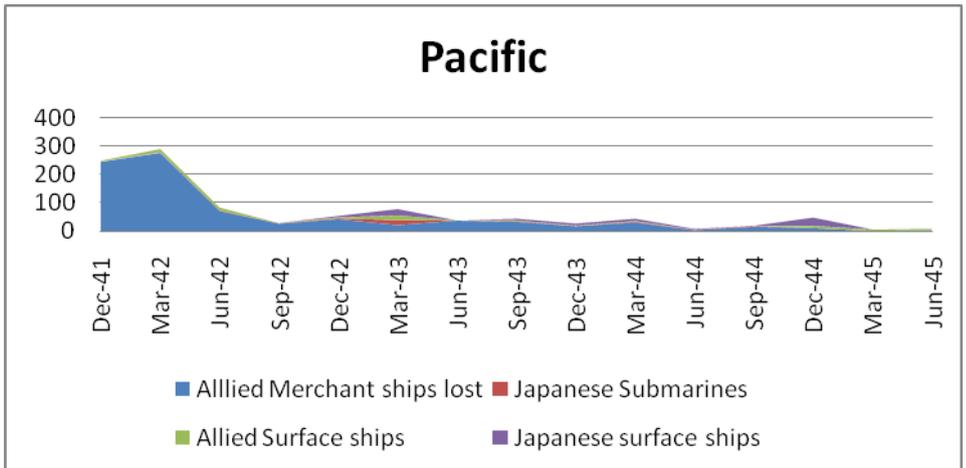
In March 1945, the Germans switch their V-Bombs from London to Antwerp, and the last V2 lands on 27th March in London, Of the V1's and the 9000 launched 25% failed to cross the channel and 1280 fell on London, killing 6200 and injuring another 18,000, of the V2's 1050 launched, 518 hit London, killing 2574 and injuring 6523 persons.

Early in May 1945 two OW's were honoured for the daring attack in midget submarines on the German Battleship Tirpitz in a Norwegian fjord, they were, LEUT John Arthur Cotching (1938) DSC, MiD, RNR and SBLT Christopher Harford Roncoroni (1939) DSC RNR , the LEUT was KIA. Midnight on 8th May 1945 was VE day (Victory in Europe)

On the 9th May 1945, the first of 150 U-Boats surrendered, flying a black flag started to arrive, most to the UK, but some to American ports, a further 200 are scuttled, of those who arrive in port, about 25% are taken up by the Allies the remainder are sunk in the North Atlantic off Northern Ireland in January 1946.

Of the Kriegsmarine surface vessels, there was 1 Battleship, in the Baltic, the **Gneisenau**, no longer in active service. 4 Heavy Cruisers, **Admiral Scheer** – sunk at Keil by RAF, **Admiral Hipper** used as a refugee ship, bombed and later scuttled, **Lutzöw** in the Baltic, **Prinz Eugen** which was years later taken to Bikini Atoll and had an "A" bomb dropped on her!, only the light cruisers **Leipzig** and **Nurnberg** along with 14 Destroyers survived WWII.

Out in the Pacific, where although most of the reporting in the media was of action by the considerable forces of America, there was a sizable British presence in the shape of the British Pacific Fleet now known as “Task Force 57” comprising of two Battleships, King George V, and Howe, 4 Aircraft carriers, five cruisers 11 Destroyers (2 Australian), the Aircraft carriers were the main weapon with Seafires (a marine version of Spitfire) Avengers, Hellcats, and Corsairs, these attacked Sakishima Island where LDCR Donald Arthur Dick (1938)RN won a DSC and a MiD, plus also a further MiD in Korea but unfortunately was KIA. The ships especially the Carriers were targeted by Kamikase attacks but saved from serious damage by their armoured flightdecks.



The last major surface warship action of the war took place when the Japanese cruiser Haguro attempts to sail through the Malacca Straits, fleet submarines report her movements and Escort Carriers try to catch up but are sighted so the Japanese ship turns back, After a few days, then on 16th May 1945 the 26th Destroyer flotilla are ready off Penang, HMS' Saumarez, Venus, Verulam, Vigilant and Virago attack from both sides in a classic night torpedo action sending the cruiser to the bottom. On board these ships were two OW's, LEUT Raymond James Veniss Perrin (1939) MiD RN on HMS **Virago** and LEUT Angus Harvey Baber (1940) RNR on HMS **Vigilant**.

The first “A” bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, killing 80,000 people and the next day the 9th August 1945 a second “A” bomb is dropped on Nagasaki killing 40,000 people. VJ Day is declared on 15th August 1945 and the end of World War II.

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During the 5 years and 8 months of the war. 9027 Honours and awards were made to the Merchant Navy and Fishing Fleet. In 1940, Lloyds War Medal was struck for the Merchant Navy and Fishing Fleet. By the wars end the RN had lost 9.3% of its personnel and 427 ships, while the British Merchant Navy lost 35,000 personnel and a further 5720 POWs.

A quotation from the 2nd Steward of the Blue Funnel Ship “Rhexenor” after being in an open lifeboat for 7 days, “Sun out, making things a little cheerful, good breakfast: 2nd Mate thought we deserved it. – Pemican, Biscuit, prunes, raisins and nuts with 2 oz of water. Lunch was 1 oz of water, Dinner was 2 oz of water” – they sailed 21 days covering 1236 nautical miles.

Appendix. A **Posthumous Awards**

Mention in Despatches (MiD)

SBLT Ball (1938) DSC, MiD - Dunkirk
 LCDR Kerridge (1919) MiD
 LEUT Low (1927) George Cross. HMS **Unity**
SBLT Lydekar (1938) MiD HMCS Weyburn
 LEUT (A) Shears (1931) HMS **Formidable**
 LCDR Smyth (1894) **LST 80** aged 68!

Nil in Army or RAF

Appendix B.

Commendations.

C/O Fosse (1920) on **Ville de Strasbourg**
 2/O Hudson (1933) on **Turakina**

OW's who achieved "Flag" rank or equivalent.

Royal Navy

VADM Sir Eric George Anderson (1916) KCB, CB, CBE, MiD*

RADM Sir Oswald Henry Dawson (1898) KBE, MiD

*ADM Lord Mountevans (1896) KCB, DSO*** CB* MiD* + 12 Foreign Decorations.

VADM Sir Noel Frank Lawrence (1899) KCB, DSO*, CB, + Legion of Honour (France), Order St. George 4th Class, Order of St. Vladimir, Order of Merit (Spain)

VADM Sir Charles Edmund Barrington Simeon (1906) KBE, CB, MiD, Order of Orange Nassau

VADM Sir John Anthony Rose Troup (1936) KCB, DSC*, MiD +

CMDRE Sir Roy Gill (1920) KBE, CBE, MiD RNR

*ADM Evans did not serve in a Naval Post during WWII, but as the head of the Defence of London. He was only 60 at outbreak of War. Admiral Ramsay was 58 in 1939.

Royal Air Force.

ACM Sir Frederick William Bowhill (1896) GBE, KCB, CMG, CB, MiD***Order of Savsur, Grand Cross of Nassau, Commander Legion of Merit (USA), Order of Polonia (Poland), Order of St. Olav (Norway) RAF

AM Sir Harold Douglas Jackman (1920) KBE, CB, CBE, AFC, RAF

AVM Sir Tom Ince Webb-Bowen (1896) KCB, CMG, CBE, Order of St. Anne (Russian), Order of Leopold (Belgium), Legion of Honour (France), Order of the Cross of Savoy (Italy) and Order of St. Michael and St Lazarus (Italy) RAF

Appendix C

Foreign Decorations awarded to Old Worcesters in World Two

Legion of Honour (France) 3

Military Cross of Poland 2

Grand Cross of Nassau (Dutch) 3

Order of St. Olav (Norwegian) 2

Croix de Guerre (Belgium) 1

Order of the Crown (Belgium) 1

Legion of Merit (USA) 6

Croix de Guerre (France) 8

Order of Polonia 1

Order of Kutuzor (Russian) 1

King Christian Medal for Liberty 1

Order of Leopold (Belgium) 2

Bronze Star of Merit (USA) 3

Old Worcester Awards and Honours in World War II.

KBE 4; KCB 1; CMG 2; CB 3; CIE 2; CBE 10; OBE 54; MBE 34; BEM 4;

GC 1; DSO 29; DSC 128; DFC 17; MC 3; DCM 2; DFM 1; DSM 1; GM 1

Mention in Despatches 212; Commendations 34 Lloyds Medal 1 Empire Medal 1;

Acknowledgements.

London Gazette 1939 to 1949

The Fourth Service John Slater

Liberty – The ships that won the war Peter Elphick

The War at Sea Gordon Smith

Sea Warfare Salamander Books Ltd

The War Years 1939 – 1945 Eyewitness Accounts Marshall Cavendish Books

U Boat Operations Vol 1 and Vol 2 Kenneth Wynn

German Kriegsmarine in WWII Chris Mcnab.

