



Amethyst Association Newsletter

December 2019

Welcome

Dear Shipmates and Members of the Association

Sadly this is the last newsletter, having agreed at the last AGM that the association will be wound up, although I am sure we will be opportunities to meet again. Here is a final roundup of news including the wonderful 70th reunion in September, the commemoration at St Peter's Church by RNA Reigate (who will make this an annual event) in July, and the Cenotaph march in November.

This should have been my Dad's last welcome letter and I have included the wonderful tribute given by Bill Evershed at his funeral. Happily Stewart was able to be present at the 70th anniversary events at Collingwood in May and the four Ships Reunion in April and was able to send a message to our reunion in September and see the pictures afterwards. Thank you for your messages of condolences. It gave great comfort to hear how he had touched so many people. The cadets are framing a photograph of him at their headquarters.

I would like to give special thanks to Trudy for everything she has done for the Association over many years. Wishing you a Happy Christmas and New Year.

Gilly O'Reilly (Newsletter)

Welfare Report

It is just 3 years ago, I took over as Welfare Officer for the Amethyst Association from Ray Kitto, who served the Association so well for many years in this role. It is of course, with great sadness that this is the last newsletter, but I am also extremely grateful to have contributed, albeit in a small way, to the life of HMS Amethyst veterans, family and friends. It has always been a very uplifting experience chatting to people and sharing their 'real-life' stories of the Yangtze Incident itself and then every day events throughout these last few years. I have learned so much more about the history of HMS Amethyst and chatting to so many people has really the embedded 'The Incident' deep into my thoughts.

I feel privileged to have been part of the Association through my dad, Joseph Ferrett, who was Leading Signaller at the time of gunfire in 1949. He and mum have been regular members of the Association since it formed and it was both sad and extremely special for mum and I to be part of the final reunion in Plymouth this September.

I must sincerely thank all those people who have allowed me into their lives and chatted with me over time. I have so enjoyed every moment and if you will allow me to carry on every now and again, I would really welcome that! Here's wishing you all a very Happy Christmas and the best of everything for 2020.

Sally Johnson (Welfare Officer)



Crossed the Bar

It is with great sadness that we announce the following deaths

Lt. Commander **Stewart Hett**, M.B.E., R.N. (Retd) crossed the bar on Wednesday 9 October 2019. Cdr Hett was President of the Amethyst Association and was navigating officer during her escape down the Yangtze in July 1949, and Cat's Officer to Simon. Stewart's untiring work for the Amethyst Association was appreciated by the whole Amethyst community.

John Frederick Thomas Dunstan, veteran of the Yangtze Incident. John served on HMS BLACK SWAN and was a most efficient Secretary of the BLACK SWAN Association. John was also the Secretary of the Four Ships Association and was largely responsible for the success of these events. He also set up the Four Ships Unit that has continued to March at the Cenotaph since its inauguration in 1999.

Ray Calcott Receives Award

Ray receiving the 'Coventry Good Citizen' award this year.





RNA Reigate 70th Anniversary of the Escape, Commemoration at St Peter's Church



RNA Reigate held a very special service in remembrance of Cdr Kerans who is buried in the Churchyard at St Peter's Church, Tandridge. Here is their report which appeared in the August 2019 RNA newsletter.

30 July 2019 sees the 70th anniversary of HMS Amethyst's legendary escape down the River Yangtze to rejoin the fleet.

On Sunday 21 July Reigate Branch commemorated this event and the life of her Captain, Cdr John Kerans DSO RN at a

ceremony at St Peter's Church, Tandridge, where Cdr Kerans is buried. Members of the Branch with buglers from TS Ark Royal, friends, families and representatives from the Amethyst Association gathered at Cdr Kerans' graveside where prayers for the fallen and for reconciliation were followed by the last post, a minute's silence, the exhortation and reveille. The Branch standard was paraded, and the Chairman laid a wreath.

Cdr Kerans' daughters, Charmian and Melanie, his grand-daughter Leonie and great grand-daughter Eliza Kerans were present, together with Gilly O'Reilly from the Amethyst Association, who was also representing her father Lt Cdr Stewart Hett MBE RN who was an officer on board Amethyst during her escape and who currently serves as President of the Association.

Reigate Branch continues its tradition of commemorating notable events and service and the Amethyst anniversary will now become part of their annual calendar of events. After the commemoration members moved to the Barley Mow in Tandridge where the Secretary presented the landlord with a print of HMS Amethyst and an accompanying account of the incident which is now displayed in the bar.

The previous evening the Branch held a film night, preceded by a curry supper, where a showing of the 'Yangtze Incident', starring Richard Todd, helped to prepare members for the following day's events.





HMS Caroline

It was lovely to see Andrew's medals of his father, SM Samuel Bannister, at the 70th reunion in Plymouth. These lost medals were recovered after a long search. He is currently liaising with HMS Caroline in Belfast to mount a permanent memorial or Blue Historical plaque in the name of the men from the Yangtze Incident. He and Raymond McCullough took some of their memorabilia, and Ray's model of Amethyst, to HMS Caroline.



HMS Amethyst Association Reunion 13-15th September 2019

A large group reunited at the Crowne Plaza, Plymouth for a very enjoyable weekend. We had a wonderful turnout. Vickie Mazarella flew in from America. Her father was a Navy dentist who served in China in 1949 and was onboard the USS Repose which came to the aid of the British wounded during the Yangtze incident. In her words...

'He recounted that shore leave was abruptly cancelled and everyone was to report back to the hospital ship immediately. They quickly steamed to the site & took the wounded onboard as best they could. Then the hospital ship did another speed run to safer waters while treating the wounded. The Americans did all they could en-route because they did not want to lose any patients. My Dad was a Navy Dentist so he had worked with plaster as part of his training to make molds for dentures, bridges, etc. He helped by mixing large and good (not too watery nor too thick) batches of plasters for splints for broken limbs. He recalled once they returned to Hong Kong, the British officers treated them quite well, & wined & dined them for a few days to show their gratitude.'

Bill Evershed gave a lovely speech and Stewart was able to join in with a recorded message. If anyone would like the slideshow pictures please email me at gillianor@icloud.com

Many thanks to Trudy for organising the weekend.









Cenotaph Parade November 2019



Ian Noakes,
chair of HMS
London
Association,
again co-
ordinated a
fantastic
turnout of
The Four

Ships Yangtze Incident contingent. I was very moved to wear my father's medals, and I think we did him, and all the Four Ships, proud and the marching passed muster! We were pleased to get a mention by the BBC.





This year we were joined by the family of Tony Vincent, Amethyst Yangtze casualty. Tony's family included three generations, daughter Dawn, granddaughter Tracey, and great granddaughter Inez. It was a very special occasion, and they were able to pay tribute to him with their own wreath.

They shared a photo of the HMS Amethyst plaque dedicated to the casualties in the Chapel of St Christopher - Devonport Naval Base, which they had visited.

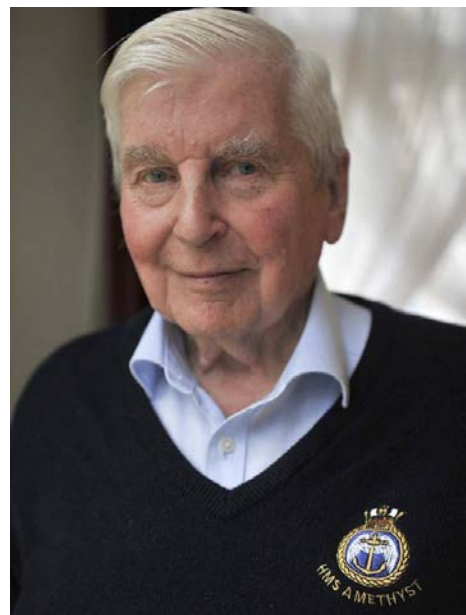


Tribute to Stewart Hett by Bill Evershed

Dear Stewart devoted his whole life to his family and to the Navy. So what more could a Divine Lord or a Sea Lord ask? And what could we?

My wife, Penny, and I have known Stewart & Eve for 58 years and during those years we have witnessed the deep bond of love between Stewart and Eve and the love and care that they give to their children, to Charles, to Caroline, to Christopher and to Gilly, and to their families and grand-children. Team Hett is indeed a deeply bonded and winning team.

So how did we first come to know you all? Stewart & I happened to serve in the Navy together upon three occasions, which was unusual in a Navy as big as it then was.



Our first time together was in the then Home Fleet flagship, the Cruiser, HMS BERMUDA, in 1961, which had been re-commissioned at rather short notice and this resulted in a mix of officers and sailors who were not necessarily the Admiralty's first choice. This, and the ship's Captain, ensured that the ship would be a happy one. Stewart was the Navigating Officer and I was the Captain's Secretary. So, for those of you who know the Navy, both of us worked very closely to the Captain but neither of us at that time had a Division of sailors. And I suppose it was for this reason that on formal occasions, we stood together with the other odd balls.



Stewart's service in the BERMUDA was a good mix of work and fun. He certainly was a highly esteemed Navigator and I watched him training Midshipmen. No Satnavs then! Yes, we had Echo Sounders and Radar but both could be defective and when out of sight of land you have to turn to the sun, at mid-day, sunrise, sunset, moonrise, moon set and star sights. And you need to be able to identify the stars. The Pole Star would be a good start. And you need a finely honed, accurate and quick mathematical brain. One of you grand-children will have inherited Stewart's sharp brain.

And another of you will have inherited his sense of mischief because it was on our Runs Ashore that Stewart really came into his own because he had a Diners Club Card.

This was long before Barclaycards and other Bank cards were invented. And this meant that even towards the end of a month when the rest of us had run out of money, Stewart could always fund a Run Ashore and we would repay him on Pay Day. Of course we were young; as young then as you grandchildren now are, and perhaps we were sometimes a little over-exuberant. His Diners Club Card did sometimes alas lead us astray. Let me show you some snapshots. Let me take you first to the bar of an upmarket hotel in Hamilton, the capital of the Colony of Bermuda where we'd gone to watch the cabaret. This was abysmally awful, catering for American tastes, and we decided it needed livening up. There was suddenly a voice – and it wasn't mine – crying out 'Champagne pour les Artistes'. Could this have been Stewart's voice? It surely could! It was one of his favourite war cries!

And it is a paradox that every one of us will continue to be able to hear Stewart's voice in our minds for many years in the future.

Anyway the four nice chaps they'd assumed us to be on arrival were then invited to leave the premises!

I will now take you to Gibraltar and to another cabaret but one of an entirely different nature in the old Panama Club on Eastern beach. Long since gone: I think it consisted of a pair of Nissen huts. Here the cabaret was provided by a dancing girl. She was a well-endowed lass but had a very small wardrobe. This consisted as far as I remember of two halves of a coconut shell and a bunch of bananas. Now, one of our team; let us call him Mike Shallow because that was his real name – and it was interesting that much later in our lives Mike and I worked for many years at Cathedrals and for this reason swore me to silence – claimed that he felt hungry. And Stewart's skill here was to persuade him that the bananas around the girl's waist were real. So that when she approached our table, Mike grabbed a banana and pulled. There was a curious ripping sound. And, once again, the Diners Club Team were invited to leave.

I will now take you to Antwerp and this was altogether a much more couth Run Ashore because Eve was with us. She had flown across to enjoy the ship's visit to the port. And we were all having dinner in a lovely restaurant near the Grande Place. Now, one of the soubriquets for a Navigating Officer is 'Pilot'. You will be aware that a Merchant ship takes a pilot when entering the Thames Estuary or Southampton Water but a warship very rarely



has to do so because she carries her own specialised Navigating Officer. So 'Pilot' is a sort of nickname. Stewart was sometimes 'Sir', sometimes 'Pilot', and sometimes 'Stewart' – it depended upon the circumstances.

So we must all have been calling him 'Pilot' and the Maitre D', not unreasonably, thought we must be an airline crew from British European Airways. If we had a Pilot, we must have a Co-Pilot, an Air Engineer, a Steward and a Stewardess – and Eve was the Stewardess. We all played along happily with this and, then when the time came to pay the Bill, Stewart called out in typically Stewart fashion 'Send the Bill to British Airways'! If only!!!

But even ashore Stewart could sometimes be serious. I am now taking you to our cottage garden in Hampshire. It is a warm summer's evening and about a dozen or so of us are drinking our home-brew beer, which is all we could then afford, and awaiting the sausages. When suddenly the wife of one of the Engineer's announces that she has lost a contact lens on our lawn. Stewart's professionalism immediately took charge in organising us all into Naval squares to conduct what was known as a Box Search until the lens was finally located in the grass and the feasting could continue.

Now, how many of you grand-children can fall out of an arm-chair sideways? This was surely Stewart's best Party Trick. He could do so holding on to his glass of Gin & Tonic without spilling a drop. And make it look as if it was all the fault of the arm-chair. So, grand-children, if you haven't seen it done, today may not be a good time to try it for the first time.

However it was later in Malta when we were again serving together and on the Commander-in-Chief's staff, and happened to be near neighbours living in Guardamangia, that we all came to know each other better and our children played together.

Their garden enjoyed a wonderful position with views overlooking Marsamxett Harbour and Pieta Creek and on one sunny afternoon when I was helping Stewart prepare their garden for an evening BBQ we moved a rock and a snake slithered away into cactus. 'I don't think we'll mention this to Eve.' was his laconic comment.

So it was really our time together as good neighbours in Malta that crafted and forged this privileged and long-lasting friendship with Stewart & Eve: At his family home at Ardingly, with his ancient mother and with his brother Sandy; at various Married Quarters in Portsmouth and Gibraltar, and at their home here in Northwood. This friendship has extended to our children and Penny and I were so welcomed by Charles & Elizabeth on a visit to New Zealand and Charles and our daughter Katharine met regularly in Hong Kong. And, of course, it led to our friendship with Gilly & Keith through the AMETHYST Association.

It was in later years that Stewart's early service in the AMETHYST turned full circle and, in place of the Division that he didn't have in the BERMUDA, he acquired AMETHYST's entire Ship's Company and their families. Year after year he led the veteran AMETHYSTs at Whitehall on Remembrance Sunday, in fine weather and in foul; but usually fine; and he led

