

# LOYAL and STEADFAST

The Story of H.M.S. Consort



As Told By Those Who Served In Her

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**Paul Morrison** helped compile *Loyal and Steadfast* and was ably assisted by the book's working committee of James Flanagan, Terry Hodgins and Ron Howell. Paul works for a Naval Museum: the Warships & Marine Corps Museum which, along with his brother he helped establish in 1963. It was through the Museum that Paul became involved with the HMS CONSORT Association, a friendship which has now lasted for more than a decade. When not involved in the study and preservation of Naval history, Paul's other interests are ancient history and archaeology, and writing short stories and novels, many of which are set against historical or maritime backgrounds.

**Mary Needs**, a member of the HMS CONSORT Association is the artist who painted the watercolour on the cover of *Loyal and Steadfast*. Mary's husband Gordon was a Boy Seaman, along with George Andrews, at HMS ST.VINCENT in the 1940s and it was George Andrews who commissioned Mary's first painting of CONSORT. Since retiring from a business career, CONSORT has become almost a second career for Mary, having completed six large paintings of the ship in acrylic and watercolour for presentation, along with many other sketches and paintings of CONSORT for use as greetings cards and mementos. Other favourite subjects are landscapes and flowers.

## **A SPECIAL THANKS**

The book you are holding is a story that most CONSORT's have long wanted telling, ever since the film 'The Yangtze Incident' was first shown. We had talked long and often about writing a book on life in HMS CONSORT without doing anything serious about starting such a book.

It would never have been in print if it wasn't for one man, Mr Paul Morrison. Having researched the history of HMS CONSORT, Paul informed the Committee of the CONSORT Association that it was a story worth telling. We then asked Paul if he would write the book for the CONSORT shipmates and more importantly for their families, their children and grandchildren.

It was at his suggestion and encouragement that the men who served in CONSORT write the stories of their life on board the destroyer during her ten years of continuous service in the Far East. Paul has then woven these stories from the shipmates in his unique way to make a most interesting and factual book of life in a Royal Navy ship in the 1940s and 50s.

Our sincere thanks go to Paul firstly for his interest in HMS CONSORT; his many hours spent in researching the history of the ship; and to his dedication in making this book the reality which you are now about to read.

The book's Steering Committee and all CONSORTs wish to thank Paul Morrison for the work and dedication he has given to the book. The CONSORTs are eternally grateful.

Committee of HMS CONSORT Association  
August, 2008

## FOREWORD

CONSORT was a happy ship and although I can speak personally, only of the first commission, this was obviously the case for the whole eleven years of her active life. The evidence for this is shown in the strength of the CONSORT Association, which has endured and prospered for many years now. The Yangtze Incident when the ship was under fire from the Communist Chinese causing heavy casualties among the ship's company, must also be a considerable binding factor.

As we are all getting older, the life of the Association is limited by age but this book will provide an enduring record of our activities and life together when serving as part of the Far East Fleet.

Commander R. R. A. Cowan, M.B.E. R.N. (Retd)

◆ Lieutenant Cowan did his initial training at HMS BRITANNIA in 1939. Between January 1940 - April 1943 he spent time at the Royal Naval Engineering College before obtaining his Watchkeeping Certificate in the cruiser HMS LONDON. From September 1943 - February 1946 he served in the cruiser HMS DIADEM. He then served as Engineer Officer in the Hunt Class destroyer HMS MEYNELL from February 1946 - May 1946 before joining HMS CONSORT, his second ship as Engineer Officer.

## THE NEW SHIP

The new ship's name was CONSORT and she was the second vessel to see service in the Royal Navy with that name. The first CONSORT was a trawler of 181 tons, hired by the Royal Navy from 1915 – 1919 and used as a minesweeper (Admiralty No.1612). She operated out of Grimsby and was armed with a single 12 pounder gun.

The second CONSORT, a much larger vessel was launched at the shipyard of Alexander Stephen & Sons, Glasgow on 19th October 1944 and was an improved C class destroyer of the COSSACK class. Technical details for the new destroyer were:

Displacement: 2,550 tons (full load)

Length: 363 feet

Armament: 4 x 4.5-inch; 4 x 40mm Bofors; various small calibre anti-aircraft guns; 4 x 21-inch torpedo tubes

Engineering: Parsons gear turbines; 2 shafts; shp 40,000  
2 Admiralty drum 3 type boilers

Speed: 33 knots

Complement: 186

The C class destroyers were ordered in 1942 but only the first, the CA group saw wartime service. The ships were of a riveted construction with the last three groups (CH, CO and CR) having remote power control fitted to their 4.5-inch guns. The C class were of an emergency war design with 32 destroyers eventually constructed. CONSORT and her seven sister-ships of the CO group were originally designated the 13th Emergency Flotilla later becoming the 8th Destroyer Flotilla.

The role of the destroyers in World War 2 and in the early post-war period were as the *work horses* of the Navy. With their high speed, manoeuvrability and seaworthiness the destroyers were well-equipped for various duties that included anti-submarine escort work, close-range anti-aircraft support, close inshore bombardment, and radar

picket duties. They were multi-purpose ships capable of operating under conditions ranging from the cold waters of the Arctic to the warmer expanses of the Pacific.

With the ending of World War 2 and the subsequent post-war cuts to the Fleet i.e. the scrapping or mothballing of many of the older battleships and cruisers as well as older destroyers and smaller escort ships such as sloops and corvettes, the Royal Navy still had nearly 150 operational destroyers (including the C class) in the Fleet.

Soviet Russia with its territorial expansion – the absorption of the Baltic States of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania; as well as parts of Finland and Poland; and the establishment of Communist regimes in the ‘satellite’ states of Albania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary, Poland and Romania now posed a threat to peace in post-World War 2 Europe. The Soviet Navy was an important part of this potential threat (particularly with its expanding submarine fleet), and it was against this background of Soviet control of Eastern Europe in what was to become known as the Cold War, and Russia’s support for global Communist expansion in China and French Indo-China that construction of HMS CONSORT was finally completed.

The new ship had to undergo a series of sea trials for seaworthiness before acceptance into the Navy. In particular, the ship’s engines had to be tested under severe conditions and speed trials carried out. Though the new ship was still many months away from commissioning most of the crew had already joined her for this ‘working up’ period; the Devonport Drafting Office having issued the first CONSORT Draft Chit to Engine Room Artificer (ERA) Roach in January 1945, (two years before the ship was finally commissioned).

**Stoker Dennis Hughes** was another who joined the ship while it was being made ready: “We left Plymouth on 6th March 1946 to join CONSORT. There were four of us –



myself, Graham Baker, Ian Carpenter and Edward Little, all stokers. When we eventually arrived in Govan, Glasgow where CONSORT was being built, we were told that the ship was still being cleaned up. We were informed by an officer that he knew of a place where we could stay, a council house in a nearby housing estate. She was a nice Scottish lady and we had porridge of course for breakfast every day. I think we were there for approximately three weeks, reporting to the shipyard each morning.

“On the first morning the Engineer Officer took us down to the engine and boiler rooms and told us that if we didn’t show enthusiasm and perform our duties to his liking he would have our guts for garters – he was a miserable sod.”

Life in those first few days was difficult in other ways. Dennis Hughes didn’t have any money. “It was a week or two before we got any pay and on a run ashore into Glasgow our gang went into a Salvation Army Canteen. My pals ordered a bite to eat and the lady asked what about me. I was very upset, telling her I had no money, and she said when I come back into the canteen to always ask for her. She really looked after me and I’ve always had a great admiration for the Salvation Army.

“VANGUARD (the last battleship to be constructed for the Royal Navy) was being built just along from CONSORT. One day a large merchant ship came in and began unloading bananas – the first since the end of the war. They gave us a bunch each and when we went ashore everybody was amazed at us because they hadn’t seen bananas for years. We gave most of them away and were of course very popular.

“We spent months at sea doing exercises and trials with dockyard officials on board. Everything was done to test both us and the ship out.” After passing sea trials, CONSORT steamed to Devonport to be fitted out and some delay was caused by a shortage of vital fire control equipment for the Transmitting station.

**Able Seaman Alan Quirk** was another of the commissioning crew who joined the ship in Christmas, 1946. "I left HMS WAKEFUL in Rosyth and travelled by train to Devonport. I was met by Ordinary Seaman Joe Tootell on the gangway and then made my way to the forward mess deck on the port side."

Commissioning Day was held on a Monday, 27th January 1947, a cold and bleak day. There were no formalities or celebrations for the ship was just another warship, one of the many commissioned into the Navy since 1939. For a war weary Britain, commissioning ceremonies had become nothing special and simply just another routine affair.

**Stoker John English** had no particular or outstanding memories of the day with one exception. "If there were any celebrations I missed them. Certainly no speeches were heard in the Stokers Mess and the only band was the elastic one around the Pay Bobs Wallet. My father found his way to the jetty where CONSORT was tied up. He was an ex-stoker himself, having served in World War 1 in the battlecruiser HMS LION, Beatty's flagship at Jutland. I was given fifteen minutes to say, 'Nice to see you'."

**Able Seaman Jock Shaw**, the ship's senior Quarter Master would look back on the day as something more than just the commissioning of a new ship into the Navy. "I was to receive Mention in Despatches for work done in the last two years of the war, being seconded to the Army who were fighting the Japanese in Burma. Along with a small band of matelots we manned the various landing craft used in transporting the soldiers through the highly dangerous waterways of the Burmese jungle. The enemy though were not the only danger in these jungles and many of us, including myself fell pray to malaria-carrying mosquitos. When hostilities ceased, my time in the Navy came to an end but I immediately signed up once more for another four years – just to see what the peacetime Navy was like!"

**Ordinary Seaman Peter Cawley** remembered that it was cold and overcast. “There weren’t any bands or relatives. In fact we anchored in Plymouth Sound late in the morning. Lieutenant Commander Gray, the ship’s commanding officer cleared lower deck with all hands mustered in the forward mess deck to give us a short speech. At the conclusion he presented Able Seaman Jock Shaw his Mention in Despatches for service in the Far East.

“CONSORT’s crew were a mixed bunch: the chief petty officers and petty officers being men who’d served before World War 2; the rest were blokes rolling through their enlistment or re-enlistment, boy seamen, national servicemen, and those like myself who had joined up in the first post-war recruitment.” The Devonport Division manned the ship during its whole period of service in the Navy.

Lieutenant Commander ‘Dolly’ Gray was considered by many who served in the ship to be a fair man, at least to those who had the opportunity to meet him. Stoker John English wasn’t one of these privileged few. “In my sixteen months on board I never set eyes upon him. He never visited the boiler room to introduce himself. He was well regarded and considered fair by those who were privileged to meet him but stokers somehow did not figure in that circle.”

A sailor’s existence in a destroyer or any small ship was always a hard life with few comforts and certainly no privacy. “That much used compartment on the port side,” recalled John English, “known as the *heads* consisted of four toilet seats on a raised platform with a swing door covering the lower half of the body with the top half exposed, enabling you to have a sociable conversation with your other seated companions.

“You were issued with a galvanised bucket for your other needs, there being no wash basins on CONSORT. There was no washing powder in those days, you punched

holes in the bottom of a tickler tin, shaved a quantity of hard soap in and plunged the tin in and out of the water in the bucket.” There was some benefits though from working in the boiler rooms. “Alternatively, if a stoker, you placed the steam drain pipe into the bucket with flakes from a soap bar and hey presto, thick foam. You would then put in your overalls, stirring for four minutes only. If you left them in any longer you would remove the blue dye. The washed overalls were then hung by the boiler drum and would be dry within six minutes.”

**Able Seaman Ron Howell** who joined the ship a short time after commissioning held a high regard for Lieutenant Commander Gray. “He was a highly professional officer. There was very little contact between commanding officer and the lower deck but the fairness of our Commanding Officer was matched by the response of the crew whenever we went to sea for exercises, when they put in that extra bit of effort to make sure we came out on top. Some years after I left the Navy, I read an obituary for Lieutenant Commander Gray, he had by that time reached the rank of Rear Admiral. I sent a letter of condolence to his widow and she replied, thanking me and explaining that the funeral was to be a private affair but enclosed an invitation to a Memorial Service to be held a few weeks later. Sadly, I was unable to attend.

“One of my more dismal memories of CONSORT was painting the ship in a snowstorm in Plymouth Sound in spite of the ship’s side being coated in ice!”

**Ordinary Seaman Joe Tootell** also remembered the ice. “The ship’s company worked in relays round the clock, chipping ice from the mast and yards. The guns, torpedo tubes and hatches all had to be freed of ice. The tap, tap, tap of chipping hammers resounded throughout the ship. On the mess decks the priority was drying our kit ready for the next attack on the ice.”

Shore leave was granted following the commissioning.

Peter Cawley recalled, “We had shore leave from 4 p.m. to 11 p.m. nightly. The last run ashore was 30th January and it was even colder on that night than the previous ones because it was snowing.”

Barely four days after commissioning, CONSORT (with pennant no. R76 painted in large letters on her port and starboard sides), sailed on 31st January 1947 for the warmer climates of Hong Kong and the Far East where she was to join sister-ships COSSACK, COMUS, CONCORD and CONSTANCE, the five destroyers constituting the 8th Destroyer Flotilla, British Pacific Fleet. It would be ten long years before CONSORT would again return to home waters...

*O God of Ages, in whose sight,  
A thousand years are like one night.  
Events from fifty years may seem,  
To us a half-forgotten dream.  
So bless our memories here today,  
And absent friends for whom we pray. Amen.*

◆ The Naval Graces which close each chapter of this book were written by the Reverend Derek Polgrean who himself served in the ship as a Boy Seaman during the Korean War. These Naval Graces (often humorous), blessed the dinners at the annual HMS CONSORT Association reunions held in May of each year.

## FIRST DEPLOYMENT

**Stoker Norman Cotton** serving in his first ship remembered well those first few days when the ship departed England. “We were to have escorted the new battleship HMS VANGUARD and the Royal Yacht to see them safely on their way to South Africa. When CONSORT left Plymouth however, it was found that the weather in the Bay of Biscay was so bad it delayed the sailing of the royal party but CONSORT was allowed to continue for the Far East.

“The weather was so foul that the heaving seas took most of the upper deck lockers over the side. I remember being on the gun deck with, I think it was John English, and saw this huge wave coming towards us. I said, ‘Jesus Christ! This is going down the funnel.’ I am pleased to say that it didn’t but it was a great introduction to my first time at sea.”

Stoker Dennis Hughes kept a small diary written up in a Kenton Writing Pad, issued for the Navy, Army and Air Force and which carried a printed warning on its cover, (for Britain was still experiencing shortages in food and other commodities even though the war had ended more than eighteen months previously). The warning on the cover read: *Owing to the shortage of paper, you are urged in the National Interest to use sparingly and use both sides of the paper.*

The diary was headed ‘Diary of My Foreign Commissions’ and the first entry read: “January 31st. We left U.K. at 5 p.m. for the Med and Far East. It was very disheartening to watch the English coastline fade away into the horizon knowing that most of us wouldn’t see our home country again for the best part of two and a half years.”

After a short stop in Gibraltar to refuel, CONSORT sailed for Malta: “9th February. 0700. We arrived at Malta after a very lovely trip, (the weather being extremely rough

in the earlier part of the voyage in the Bay of Biscay). First impressions of the place were good although Jerry, (the Germans during the war) have done a lot of damage to it. Glad to say I can go ashore tonight so shall be able to scout around. We are staying in Malta for five weeks doing Battle Exercises etc.”

Another who remembered Malta, but for far different reasons was Stoker John English. For many of ship’s young and impressionable crew it was their first time ashore in a foreign port. “It was my first experience of alcohol,” John English recalled. “Ambeat was its name, the residue from second pressing of wine. It cost 5 pence and after three of them and a beer I passed out cold. One seaman, Leading Stoker Tom Nash and another somehow got me back to the liberty boat. I was unconscious. My Ducks were covered in diesel oil from the liberty boat and unable to stand, I was hauled aboard CONSORT by winch. Dispatched to the Flats. I pleaded youth and inexperience.”

Being a new ship, CONSORT was having minor teething problems, particularly with her engines. **Lieutenant (E) Ron Cowan** was the ship’s Engineer Officer who had joined CONSORT shortly after commissioning when the previous officer, unwell and unfit for overseas duty was stood down. “After the stop at Gibraltar where we had trouble with one of our extractor pumps, which was not resolved, we carried on to Malta where the pump was repaired in the dockyard.

“As the only Engineer Officer I did not have any watchkeeping duties but had to be down in the engine room whilst entering and leaving harbour and in any time of emergency. I also had to report to the Captain on the bridge when we were ready to get underway – steam had to be raised in the boilers and the turbines wound through. The conditions in the boilers and engine room were tolerable as there were powerful fans and as far as I can recollect the men coped well.

“Day to day duties would involve me going round the boilers and engine room to see that all was functioning correctly; and also to visit any other areas where we had machinery; to check on the oil fuel, and arrange replenishment when required; to have the fresh water checked. We distilled our own water at sea but filled up from a shore supply in harbour. There was also paperwork and reports to be dealt with. I don’t remember being short of work.”

After completing her *working up* the ship left Malta for passage of the Suez Canal. CONSORT was one crew member short though, for Ordinary Seaman Jock Ross (never to be heard of again), was left behind after being arrested for stabbing a Maltese civilian.

Ordinary Seaman Joe Tootell was not impressed by the ship’s visit to Port Said. “While on shore leave there, some of the CONSORT crew were harassed by shoeshine boys. If you didn’t have a shoeshine then your white fronts and shorts were bombarded with shoe black!”

John English and his three companions, being more adventurous had a better time ashore. “The day went well, except for the difficulties of getting on a bloody camel!” Dennis Hughes wrote in his diary: “17th March. Arrived at Port Said in Egypt at nine this morning. It looks a lovely place from the harbour but it’s not nice for us lads to go ashore there. Sailors are always getting knifed. It is just as well I am duty watch aboard ship.”

But Dennis Hughes also had other more exciting matters on his mind. In the entry for the previous day he had written: “Today I had my exam with six others to be rated from Acting to First Class Stoker, and I am much surprised to hear that I passed with 76%. Very good. That was 15% higher than any of the others and I was recommended by the Engineer Officer.”

Ronnie Cowan too had memories of this period in Egypt but for far different reasons. “In the course of passing



through the Suez Canal we had to tie up on the eastern bank to allow a convoy of merchant ships to proceed northwards. As a result we got stuck on the bottom and had to lower boats to take cables to the western bank so that we could winch ourselves off. In the course of this the bottom of the canal was stirred up and (sea) shells sucked into the condensers which blocked the tubes causing overheating. To Lieutenant Commander Gray's annoyance, we had to anchor in the Bitter Lakes, shut down the machinery, close the inlet and outlet valves and open the condensers. With some 3,000 tubes to be *rodded* through, it took a considerable time to clear them."

One of those whose job it was to check the damage was **Engine Room Artificer Peter Willis** who had joined the ship in the months before its commissioning. "In order to break the monotony of being a permanent dockyard fixture during our long sojourn at Devonport caused by a lack of crew (we didn't get a full crew until the end of 1946), Spud Murphy and I had both volunteered for Shallow Water Divers course at HMS DEFIANCE which involved climbing into a Sladen Suit and breathing through a lung which comprised of a rubber bag which fitted over the shoulders. After graduating we both gained our qualification and quite honestly thought that was going to be the end of our underwater experiences.

"It came as something of a surprise when a few months later while passing through the Suez Canal the ship grounded and an inspection was required of the port propeller and rudder to assess any damage. When we anchored in the Bitter Lakes, there was a lengthy discussion as to exactly who would make the survey and though our T.A.S. Officer, Gunner John Pearson was more than willing to *have a go*, it was finally decided that he would need to *supervise* the operation and I would be the one to put my newly won diving qualification to the test. I am delighted to say that John did the supervision job to perfection and I

was truly thankful for that when I eventually returned to the surface and reported, ‘No Damage’.”

After transiting the Canal the ship called at Aden, Trincomalee (in Ceylon), and Singapore. The last leg of the voyage from Singapore to Hong Kong was painfully slow – about four knots as the ship had to act as escort for a tug and floating crane. During the course of this CONSORT took in tow an unmanned and abandoned barge for which the destroyer’s crew eventually got some prize money. Ordinary Seaman Peter Cawley recalled, “Orders came to search for a lighter/barge, (YF325), belonging to the Americans that was adrift and which we found about midnight on April 30th. The man who jumped aboard the barge first to receive the towing lines was Petty Officer Tom Mason. Two years later we each received 19 shillings and 7 pence (3 days pay) salvage award.”

The eventual arrival in Hong Kong, base for the 8th Destroyer Flotilla was not a good one for Ronnie Cowan, CONSORT’s Engineer Officer. “In Hong Kong we met up with our Flotilla Leader, HMS COSSACK and I was summoned by the Flotilla Engineer Officer to see him with our Engine Room Register. I was then given a rocket for shutting down to one of each auxiliary pump during most of our trip out.”

**Boy Seaman Roy Bater** joined the ship in Hong Kong. The Boy Seamen were mere lads between the ages of fifteen to seventeen serving their apprenticeships in the Navy. It was a tradition which went back to the previous century when numbers of personnel in a much larger Navy had to be bolstered. Being a young and impressionable lad, Roy Bater had the *fear of God* put in to him regarding CONSORT.

“We took passage from Singapore to Hong Kong in the sloop HMS BLACK SWAN. Upon arrival we were told that the ship we were to join, HMS CONTEST was going home and that we would be joining HMS TAMAR (the

shore establishment) pending a decision on our future. The upshot was that we were told we would be joining CONSORT.

“The news was received in shocked silence. She was a Devonport Division ship, and we were from the premier Portsmouth Division. They couldn’t do that! It was against King’s Regulations, or so we thought, and besides, we didn’t speak the same language! It was suggested that we inform our next of kin in case we were marooned or worse.

“A few days later we stood on the jetty and viewed our new ship with great suspicion. She looked normal. There didn’t appear to be a grating on the quarterdeck where the daily floggings took place and the *Buffer*, (Bosun) was seen to smile. And so we joined a Devonport war canoe. The weeks and months passed and we integrated without any bother at all. We soon considered ourselves as *Janners*, members of the best ship’s company in the entire fleet.”

There was of course shore leave to look forward to in Hong Kong, then known as the ‘Jewel of the East’ and the crew were quick to take the opportunity of exploring this exotic Far Eastern port. For many, the first stop ashore was the China Fleet Club where a good meal of steak and eggs could be had for a pittance. And then there were of course the shops where silk, ivory carvings, jade and other strange and wonderful items could be purchased. And if one was lonely there were always the ladies available to make you forget, at least for a short time the loneliness. For John English and many others of his shipmates, “Hong Kong was the Jewel of the Orient and a place where you always wanted to return.”

For Dennis Hughes there were also other more dismal memories of Hong Kong. “Occasionally we had to put to sea because of warnings of gales and typhoons. We also suffered from the tropical heat, and whilst in port we had to do patrol duty in the town – Royal Navy Police Duty.”

During this period CONSORT also made short visits to

Formosa before taking up her first duties with the Commonwealth Occupation Forces based in Sasebo, Japan. Ronnie Cowan recalled that, “During our time in Japan we visited Kure from time to time and on one occasion had to go into dry-dock to have some plating repaired which had been holed at the waterline and was contaminating the oil fuel. To clean the tanks, the Chief Stoker was provided with a working party of Japanese women which scandalized him. I had to take responsibility for docking the ship and seeing that she was properly shored up, for which the Admiralty paid me the princely sum of two pounds!

“From Kure we also had the opportunity of visiting Hiroshima and seeing the devastation caused by the atomic bomb. We subsequently visited Nagasaki where the second bomb was dropped.” For Joe Tootell, “the scenes of devastation were heart rending.”

The war had ended less than two year previous but Ron Howell found, “Going ashore in Japan was always a pleasure. The Japanese always seemed to be very polite and formal by nature, at least that was the outward appearance; what they were actually thinking it was hard to tell. Luxury goods were in short supply and we quickly found out that cigarettes, soap etc. bought in the canteen for coppers, could be sold ashore for enough to provide a night’s entertainment.

“My most outstanding memory though was the hospitality of the Australian Occupation Forces and their families who had joined them in Japan in the married quarters. I spent many an evening enjoying the company of one such family, a sergeant, his wife and their two children who provided a family atmosphere which was obviously lacking aboard ship.”

Japan was to prove highly popular with the ship’s company with visits ashore to the gardens, tea houses and temples. There were also sporting events between the ship and the shore-based occupation forces – particularly the

Australians. The 'Cricket Match in Kure' was to become something of a legend. Held in the autumn of 1948 during the ship's second visit to Japan it was a good example of the friendly but competitive rivalry existing throughout this period between those ashore and afloat.

**Boy Seaman Terry Hodgins** took part in the legendary game which was to rate up there with the Ashes, at least to those taking part in it. "For most of our group it was our very first encounter with the Aussies, and those of us who were looking forward to the event and who had always viewed cricket as a genteel game played in the spirit of, 'Better to have played and lost than not to play at all,' were soon to be introduced to a whole new way of playing the game. If our reception at the ground was several degrees less than cool, it was nothing compared to the *Tossers* we were called when we won the toss and took up our fielding positions.

"I cannot remember exactly how many they scored except to say that our main bowler, Leading Seaman Bill Sykes, who had played in the Lancashire League cricket, bowled like a demon and kept the score down to around the 150 mark. At the end of his stint he made the memorable remark that you had to uproot all three stumps to have any chance of winning an L.B.W. appeal. The Aussie umpire was less than amused.

"After tea was taken which comprised at least four tinnies of beer and two doorstep sandwiches, it was our turn to bat and all that had gone before was as nothing to what was to come. My own recollections are of the legitimacy of my birth being questioned at least five times before I had even reached the wicket, and for the short time I remained there I was called a *Pommie Poofster* at least a dozen times. Could this really be cricket, I asked myself.

"I vividly recall that despite the constant sledging Boy Seaman Dave Morgan proved he had a thicker skin than most because with Bill Sykes, he played a big part in

advancing our score to a respectable ton. With only two wickets left and very little hope of victory there emerged from the pavilion the diminutive figure of Boy Seaman Ivan (Benny) Bennet-Bound. Suffice it to say that at the end of the day our Benny was still at the wicket to hit a glorious winning boundary. When it was over the Aussie team members and their supporters treated us like royalty and the spirit of camaraderie that filled the air was perfectly illustrated by the dozens of empty tinnies that littered the tables inside and outside of the pavilion.”

There was also a bit of *competition* with the Americans. **Electrical Artificer Arthur Pearse** was in charge one evening of a CONSORT shore patrol at Sasebo jetty. “The liberty men were returning to their ships after a night in the town – Royal Navy and some United States Navy sailors. Two of them had exchanged hats during the evening’s festivities but were now involved in a heated discussion. The American wanted a re-exchange, obviously more concerned about being improperly dressed when returning aboard ship than the British sailor. A large ring of shipmates from both Navies quickly gathered around the two as the argument heated up. It was apparent that there would be no peaceful resolution

“I was inexperienced with the situation but our shore patrol as it reluctantly approached the ever increasing circle was saved from taking action by the arrival of a U.S. jeep carrying Military Police. The jeep broke through the circle, grabbed the American sailor while still in motion and exited the way it had come. The disappointed crowd dispersed to the waiting liberty boats and the inexperienced petty officer (me) breathed a sigh of relief.”

Art Pearse also remembered more *serious* happenings aboard the ship itself. It was to be a night encounter he would never forget. “Whenever two or more ships of the 8th Flotilla were gathered together at night and a friendly cruiser, or such, was in the vicinity, which was the excuse

for a night encounter. I don't think we actually went to Action Stations because I remember frequently hanging about on the upper deck with others, excited by CONSORT cutting through the water at speed as we zig-zagged in towards *the target*.

"The order to *darken ship* would of course come over the speakers and presumably, many of the Ship's Company would play a vital role in the exercise. As we *off watch* people stood swaying in the darkness on the upper deck, occasionally we would see a sister-ship at close hand, perhaps at the end of their zig when we were at the end of our zag.

"One night, while we were somewhere south of Japan and doing one of these encounters, I must have been the only electrical body available when the ship astern of us reported that our shaded stern light was not visible to them; consequently they were having trouble keeping station. The truth is that we E.A's don't usually get mixed up with shaded stern lights or any other such trivia. We reserve ourselves for the important stuff like fire control, gyro, generators, steering gear etc. To put it more simply, when I threw the switch for the shaded stern light, I didn't know what in the hell I was doing. The darkened ship didn't stay that way because suddenly everything about me lit up, including all those pretty lights that we use in harbour to illuminate the ship from bow to stern, What a goof!

"I'm not too sure what happened next but I guess I must have somehow rectified the situation. My next thought was how much trouble I would be in for surely I had wrecked the whole exercise. To my chagrin, the ship astern reported that they could now see our shaded stern light!

"I went to find my senior. I found him in the gyro room with a bottle of gin and confessed to him what I had done. To my surprise, he didn't explode. 'Have a drink,' he said. 'It will take your mind off things.' After a couple of shots, I began to see it in a much more philosophical way and by

the time we left the gyro room it had all become a bit of a giggle.

“The next morning we arrived in harbour and around noon, the Skipper and a couple of the other officers went off to the post-exercise conference. By then, the gin had worn off and I imagined at least a dozen scenarios involving the Skipper explaining CONSORT’s illuminations to more senior officers, and in each, he came back aboard looking for ‘that bloody idiot.’ It didn’t happen though. I never ever heard another word about it from anyone on board.”

CONSORT’s tour in Japan was extended and it was late October 1947 before she returned to Hong Kong. Peter Cawley remembered that, “November saw the start of a major refit and we were accommodated in the Dockyard Barracks. We also got a new commanding officer who had been transferred from HMS CONTEST, Lieutenant Commander John Cartwright. At this time the British Pacific Fleet was renamed the Far East Fleet. However, a more significant event took place when for economy reasons the Fleet was reduced and carriers, THESEUS and GLORY, two cruisers, MANXMAN and GAMBIA, together with the depot ship ADAMANT and her submarines, and the destroyers COCKADE, CONTEST and COMET were all returned to the U.K.”

CONSORT also got a new pennant number. With the step down from the wartime British Pacific Fleet to the peacetime name of British Far East Fleet her original number of R76 now changed to her peacetime number of D76.

It was in October 1947, that Able Seaman Ron Howell was promoted to Leading Seaman which brought with it a *special duty*. “When I joined CONSORT, I was just Able Seaman and worked ‘part of the ship’ ie. just one of the crew who helped clean and maintain the ship. I progressed from there to Transmitting station sweeper. When I was



promoted to Leading Seaman, it just so happened that the Skimmer, the ship's fast fourteen foot motorboat had gone into the dockyard for a face lift. Lieutenant Commander 'Dolly' Gray had obviously done a deal with the Hong Kong Dockyard since it came back from there with all the cast iron fittings replaced with polished brass including dolphins on the rear canopy. The tailored seat cushions embroidered with the ship's badge and edged in blue added to the effect.

"It had become in effect a miniature Admiral's Barge and henceforth would become the Captain's Boat. I don't know how I came to be chosen but I became the Skimmer driver, (a post normally held by a leading stoker), answering to the Skipper. I was allowed to go ashore when I wanted except when the Skipper wanted the boat for his personal use, then I had to stay aboard ship. When Lieutenant Commander Cartwright took over, having no interest in the Skimmer as a personal boat, it became a general runabout with a leading stoker in charge.

"Coincidentally, at this time the National Serviceman who was Postie was due to go home for release and also we had embarked a class of Boy Seamen from HMS ST.VINCENT. I found myself both Postie and Killick of the Boys mess, jobs which I held until May 1949 when we returned to Hong Kong after the Yangtze Incident."

For Peter Cawley, "The first Christmas as a commissioned ship was a low key affair in Hong Kong. The youngest boy seaman, I think his name was Dufferin was dressed in the Skipper's uniform and was piped aboard, (a tradition in the Navy on Christmas Day). Santa Claus though wasn't sighted that day, although the food prepared by the Chinese cooks was excellent.

"In February 1948, CONSORT had a pleasant surprise: Due to engine trouble COSSACK was stuck in the Dockyard and we were to take her place for the southern cruise to Saigon, Singapore, Labuan, Jesselton, and Manila

in company with the cruiser LONDON and escorts, CONSTANCE, CONCORD, and ALERT.”

**Acting Leading Telegraphist Ken Miller** clearly remembered the visit to Saigon because, “HMS LONDON had difficulty in negotiating the river. The French Foreign Legion were in charge of the city which was a very pretty French city. The Vietcong were actively distributing hand grenades among cinema queues.”

**Stoker Mechanic Tom Flanagan** joined the ship shortly before CONSORT embarked on her southern cruise which he was to find as, “a most wonderful experience and a great opener for my introduction to the Far East.

“On the journey up the river to Saigon, HMS LONDON ran aground, which was all rather embarrassing for the crew of the cruiser. Vietnam was then French Indo-China and there were still French Foreign Legion soldiers with the strange hats with the handkerchief down the back of the neck, that we had seen in the films – shades of Beau Geste. While CONSORT was in Saigon we visited some remarkable ruins of the old temples and holy buildings, the craftsmanship made you wonder how they were built and by whom? They were so splendid.

“The CONSORT crew also had the chance to meet and enjoy the company of some charming American nurses. Sadly, when CONSORT reached Singapore, it was learned that they had been murdered by the Vietcong. It was sad to think of those bubbly young ladies being a target for what had they done, except I suppose for being American and an easy target.

“The next destination was Malaya and enroute from Vietnam we captured a vessel running guns into Malaya. We visited Labuan in Borneo with its houses built on stilts on the waters edge. There were the rusting wrecks on the beaches of landing craft from World War 2. Next we visited Jesselton where the CONSORT Football team played the Jesselton police. The result was of course a win

for CONSORT.

“On the way to Manila we passed lots of sunken Japanese ships. Manila was very Americanised with lots of Coca Cola and other adverts. There was one bar we went into which had swinging doors like those in the Old West saloons, the place where the good guy throws the doors open, then steps inside, gazing at the faces in the bar before moving up to the bar for his shot of Red Eye. Over the bar was a sign: Please Hand Your Guns to the Bar Tender which convinced us that it was an *Old West* theme bar, that is until the people using the bar started handing their guns over to the bar tender. We thought it was time to leave. And anyway, we were only allowed three American dollars to spend on our visit to the Philippines and couldn't afford more than one drink anyway.”

For Tom Flanagan and the other stokers on board CONSORT their duties played an important role in the efficient running, at least where the engine room and boilers, the very heart of the ship were concerned. “In the boiler room the watch keepers (two Stokers and two Stoker Petty Officers) spent 24 hours on duty and 24 hours off duty in watches of four hours duration. The most awful thing about boiler room watch keeping in the tropics was when going through the air lock door it was like entering an oven. When you entered the first door it had to be locked before opening the other door as we worked in pressurised boiler rooms. Many of the lads had a prickly heat rash that would drive you mad during the time you got through those air lock doors. Once inside you would dive for the circulating fan and bathe in the cool air flow.

“Boiler room duties included changing the burners on the boilers in a regular pattern; checking and oiling the oil and water pumps; and checking the water levels on the boiler. In the forenoon watch it was work time. We would clean all the brass work and the mezzanine floor, and everything had to be gleaming, ship-shape and in Bristol

fashion.

“In the engine room the watch keepers also spent 24 hours on duty and 24 hours off: two Stokers, a Chief Engine Room Artificer and a Stoker Petty Officer.

“Once again the forenoon watch was the working watch and there was a mountain of brass work in the engine room. Work in there was mainly with an oil can and grease gun, and the *gopher* in both the boiler room and the engine room, the stoker, made the tea, coffee or kye (which is a chocolate drink that you can stand your spoon up in). This was the drink of the night watches.

“Leading hands and stokers took care of the fire pumps and overhauled them with the ERA’s when necessary. There were daily checks of all fire fighting equipment with logs kept and any work required being noted and reported to the Chief Petty Officer. Any pipework or lagging that needed changing was a stoker job. There were also horrible jobs that the stokers had to do during refits: cleaning the bilges, oil fuel tanks, the funnel, the interiors of the boilers and many others too gruesome to think about.

“In my very first watch in the engine room I remember being fascinated by the pendulum measuring the degrees of roll of the ship. I was fascinated until the chief told me that if it went over 35 degrees of roll then we would be lucky if we came back i.e. we would most likely capsize. Thereafter, I watched the pendulum with a deeper intensity, and if it got around those figures I was on the first rung of the ladder much to the amusement of the others working in the engine room.

“I had a nice cushy job in CONSORT when I was made Upper Deck Stoker. I shared a cabin on the main deck with the Chief Stoker and did all his running. In the painting on the front cover of the book there is what looks like an archway just aft of the funnel and that was where our caboosh (cabin) was located. My jobs entailed dipping the oil fuel and water tanks to check their volumes, and topping

them up when oiling ship. When in port I would take on fresh water for the ship. I kept the log on oil fuel and water consumption. My worst job on this cushy number was when we were doing speed trials with the weather gorgeous, the sea like glass and my job being to read the fuel consumptions. These trials lasted twelve hours with four hours working up to maximum, four hours at top speed and four hours working down. I was in a confined space in the bowels of the ship in the housing under 'X' gun for the twelve hours where it was stinking hot, with the smell of oil fuel, and the ship straining to do her maximum speed, shuddering and bouncing when this maximum speed was attained. After it was all over, I would come up on the quarter deck looking green. I was never being seasick but would have a headache for a couple of days after which I would be okay."

Shortly after the southern cruise, **Boy Seaman Jim Finch** joined CONSORT. "I embarked on the troopship DILWARA at Southampton. When the ship was about to sail all the upper deck was crowded with servicemen, most of them Army, a few Royal Air Force, and fewer still Navy. There was a military band playing on the jetty, and as the last line was cast off and the ship started to move away the band struck up with, 'I'd like to get you on a slow boat to China'.

"The trip to the Far East was like a pleasure cruise for the twelve boy seamen on board. All we were required to do was keep our mess deck clean and tidy. At Aden there were bumboats selling all manner of goods and some of the soldiers were lowering buckets down with money in them for goods they ordered by shouting down to the boatmen. I was fascinated by the trust shown by both sides but it seemed to work. We also called at Colombo.

"Our next run ashore was in Singapore. I remember a group of us boys watching a Chinese funeral party. Having not been long out of training, we had been taught that if we

saw a funeral passing we should stand and salute. But what do you do when the funeral party of about twenty men pulling along by ropes a lorry which held the coffin were all laughing and smoking, and seemed to be having a good time? So in the end we just stood to attention.

“We arrived in Hong Kong six weeks after we had left the U.K. The ship was away at sea when we arrived so we had to spend a week in the China Fleet Club until her return.”

In 1948, CONSORT had two commanding officers. The first of these was when the ship was temporarily designated Flotilla Leader with Captain D, Captain J. Jefferis DSC transferring his Flag to CONSORT. The second officer to take command of the ship (in May of that year) was Commander Ian Robertson DSC & Bar.

Robertson joined the Navy in 1925, specialising in communications. In 1940, he was damage control officer in the anti-aircraft cruiser HMS CURLEW during the failed attempt to stop the German invasion of Norway). In the evacuation of Greece the following year he served as Naval Signals Liaison Officer, a position he retained during the Crete Campaign. For the remainder of World War 2 he served in communications and in Combined Operations.

When he joined CONSORT, Commander Robertson was not wearing any medal ribbons and so the story quickly went round the ship that he had dodged the war when in fact he had two medals. He was later awarded another medal, the DSO after the action on the Yangtze River in the following year. Though the Captain D, Captain Jeffries had now returned with his Flag to COSSACK, Peter Cawley remembered with pride, “that our ship retained a narrow stripe on the funnel as Half Leader.”

Returning late from shore leave was an offence which warranted harsh punishment. In the days of sail an offender could face keel hauling, an extensive flogging with the cat o’ nine tails or even a death sentence for it was an offence

verging on desertion. Surprisingly, CONSORT had its own defaulters and the ship's cook (who should have known better) and a young boy seaman serving in his first ship (who didn't know better) were two of these. It was during a visit ashore in Kure when the cook, Malcolm Dawkins and **Boy Seaman George 'Andy' Andrews** found themselves as guests of an Australian Army Major and his family.

"The Major was a member of the British Commonwealth Occupation Force in Japan, and the fact that he and his family were fantastic hosts resulted in us arriving back on board some three hours after curfew time. The Major, accepting full responsibility for the *offence* decided to accompany us to the ship where he could offer a personal apology to the Officer of the Day.

"The latter though, obviously in a foul mood because everyone else had been ashore getting legless and having a good time, was not disposed to accepting any sort of explanation from the Major and proceeded to deliver a rollicking of *Major* proportions. At the end of it, our Aussie hero, fortified by the generous quantity of Scotch consumed but now sobered by the Lieutenant's outburst, drew himself up to his full height to deliver the Mother and Father of all rollickings to the unfortunate Lieutenant. During the following twenty minutes or so the Lieutenant was constantly reminded that he had berated a Senior Officer in front of Junior Ratings which fell only marginally short of mutiny which made him liable at the very least to a Court Martial.

"At the end of it all the suitably chastened Lieutenant, more than happy to escape the firing squad allowed us to retire to our hammocks. We were warned to keep completely out of his sight for at least a month."

Tom Flanagan was another defaulter. "I had spent a couple of days enjoying Tokyo, each evening at the generosity of the Americans. Most nights were spent in the Grand Cherry in Tokyo with the exquisite girls in their

evening dresses. Would it ever end? But it did...

“I had missed the ship which had already sailed from port. On my arrival at the British Embassy in Tokyo I waited, with an (American) Lieutenant with me. The representative of the Embassy came down to see me and the Lieutenant handed him a brown envelope and then said his goodbye to me. I was then taken in a big black limousine to the docks. I was delighted to again see CONSORT alongside and I stepped from the black limousine to the cheers of the lads standing on the deck of CONSORT.

“The Embassy official handed me over to the Officer of the Day and gave him the brown envelope from the American Lieutenant. I knew at the very least I would face several days in the cells. The Officer of the Day looked at the contents of the envelope, gave me a withering look and smartly passed me on to the First Lieutenant. Again the brown envelope was read, again the same withering look and then I was brought before the Captain.

“The charge was read out and the brown envelope produced and handed to the Skipper. He read it with interest, looking at me from time to time, no withering look this time, just one of utter disbelief. He asked me if I knew what was written in the document and I replied no. He told me the wording was as follows – I had reported to the American Naval Base in the company of the American Naval Lieutenant, where CONSORT’s Liberty boat was still clearly visible making its way back to the ship. Therefore I must have missed the boat by no more than a few minutes. Because I was in the company of an American Naval Lieutenant, it was recorded that I was no more than two minutes late for the Liberty boat.

“The Captain then told me that because I had reported to the American Base immediately after the Liberty boat had left the jetty, my punishment was to be, ‘One day’s pay and leave. Dismissed.’ This meant that on our next port of call I



would not be allowed ashore and would lose one day's pay. I was absolutely delighted."

It was shortly after Commander Robertson assumed command of CONSORT that **Sub-Lieutenant William Robson** also joined the ship. His main responsibilities as a junior officer were as Boy Seamen's Divisional Officer and Officer in Charge confidential books and documents. He was also involved in all aspects of seamanship and gunnery as well as undertaking general watch keeping duties when the ship was at sea. "After a journey of almost two months I joined CONSORT at Ominato in Northern Japan in August 1948. Ominato was a small fishing village and from our point of view had the benefit of being situated on a large sheltered inland sea – ideal for exercises.

"It had been the custom for the Fleet to hold its annual get-together in late summer when it would head north from Hong Kong for a cooler climate. In former days it was Wei Hai Wei in China. This year it was in Ominato. We practiced the martial arts which only a Fleet can do together – manoeuvring, gunnery, running torpedoes, and of course meeting our friends from the other ships. We certainly didn't claim to have the polish of the Mediterranean Fleet, but were we not the descendants of the old China Fleet whose role had revolved round anti-piracy and protecting the outlying trading posts? As we dispersed after the exercises it seemed as if we might be heading towards those halcyon days again. It should perhaps have been obvious even then that this would be far from the case.

"China was about to be over-run from the north by the Communist armies – why else had we not gone to Wei Hai Wei; while in Malaya the Communists had tried to seize power, starting a war which was to last for twelve years...

*We thank you Lord for our meal today,  
And our comradeship in every way.  
Some say that Jolly Jack's a sport,  
And he has a wife in every port.*

*But you know Lord that's just not true,  
Cos we haven't been to quite a few. Amen.*

## THE MALAYAN EMERGENCY

In 1948 a state of emergency was declared by the British colonial government in Malaya. A full scale guerilla war had broken out between the Communist Malayan Liberation Army (MLA) and the Malayan police, supported by Commonwealth military forces from Australia, Fiji, New Zealand, Rhodesia, and the United Kingdom. The MLA was comprised mainly of ethnic Chinese of which there was a population of over three million living in Malaya. The guerrillas would stage hit and run attacks, particularly against the isolated rubber plantations and tin mines before withdrawing to their well-hidden hideouts deep within the tropical jungle. More than ten thousand civilians, MLA guerrillas and military personnel were killed during the conflict. HMS CONSORT was herself to be involved on and off in the hostilities from 1948 until her return to the U.K. in 1957.

Electrical Artificer Arthur Pearse recalled, "At Bass Harbour we acted as base ship for two motor launches each with a crew of about eight which, because of their shallow draught were able to patrol and search the upriver waters. We also shadowed Russian cargo ships leaving Malayan ports until they left territorial waters as well as intercepting fishing boats to ensure they were not smuggling arms for use by the guerrillas.

"On December 16th 1948, we left Singapore for another patrol, not returning until January 6th. It was on this patrol that we supported a landing by the Ghurkas which was also assisted by the two motor launches and a heavily armed Police launch. I still have the battered newspaper cutting from *The Straits Times* dated January 5th 1949, with a bold headline reading: NAVY BOMBARDS BANDIT LAIRS. It also shows a picture of CONSORT firing her 4.5-inch guns."

The news which appeared on the front page of *The*

*Straits Times* included the following from: Our Staff Correspondent, Kuala Lumpur, Tuesday. The first seaborne landing of security forces accompanied by a bombardment of bandit hideouts by the four-inch (4.5-inch) guns of a destroyer, took place on the west coast of Malaya this morning.

An army communique (continued the news report), stated that HMS CONSORT bombarded five selected positions in the jungle where the bandits were supposed to be hiding and fired nearly 150 rounds of four-inch shells. HMS CONSORT came within 400 yards of the shore. The Royal Navy worked in co-operation with the Marine Police.

A company from the 1/8 Gurkha Rifles was brought ashore in a sampan towed to the scene of operations by Naval motor launches. Meanwhile the flanks of the area had been covered by other troops travelling by land. Planes of the 656 Air Operations Squadron, based at Kuala Lumpur, acted before and during the operation as aerial spotters.

HMS CONSORT began its bombardment immediately after the troops had landed and when they were taking up their preliminary positions. The areas selected for bombardment were approved at the highest levels. The selected sites were about one to one and a half miles inland from the sea. Lieutenant Commander R. L. Boddy, Naval Liaison Officer at Malaya District Headquarters who flew in the plane doing the aerial spotting said that the shooting was extremely good....

For Stoker Tom Flanagan there had been no time during the impressive bombardment to watch the *fireworks*. "The river was a tidal river and at the turn of every tide the river was filled with jellyfish that blocked the fire pumps and the filters which had to be cleaned out at each turn of the tide. I was the Upper Deck Stoker and my job was to check the fire pumps on a regular basis. I spent most of the time up

the river cleaning the filters and putting them back, often beneath the firing guns.”

Going ashore in port for CONSORT’s crew could be particularly dangerous. On one occasion Art Pearse had to take the overnight train to Kuala Lumpur. “As we embarked on our rail journey an Army officer told us, ‘If the train is attacked it will stop and my Ghurkas will fan out into the jungle. You will stay on the train and prepare to use your weapons. On no account will you leave the train for whatever reason.’ I recall feeling very uncomfortable, especially on being told that guerrilla attacks on the rail line had become regular occurrences with many lives lost.”

Able Seaman Alan Quirk was another who found himself temporarily ashore. “When CONSORT went into refit I was seconded to a Harbour Defence Motor Launch going to Penang, Port Dickson and Swettenham. After three months I took the night train manned by armed guards from Kuala Lumpur to Singapore to rejoin the ship.”

Boy Seaman Terry Hodgins found himself, along with seven other members of the ship’s company seconded ashore. “It was an exchange between Naval personnel aboard ship and Army personnel serving ashore. We were told that it would be the *adventure of a lifetime*, but I began to feel less and less happy about it after arriving at the Army base and finding myself being issued with jungle clothing and having my rifle replaced with a sten gun.

“After three days of jungle survival training we were sent out on a five day patrol, being split into two groups led by N.C.O’s. Each patrol was accompanied by a Dyak tracker from Borneo who was practiced in the art of head hunting as well as jungle tracking. Despite his frightening appearance I immediately decided that he would be my best chance of surviving the next five days so I endeavoured to stay as close to him as possible.

“My memories of those five days can be summarized in just two words: *terror and horror*. Although the former

gradually disappeared as I became more confident of my ability to survive, the horror stayed with me throughout. The slog through the rain drenched jungle with imaginary guerrillas behind every tree; the utter misery of the overnight camps as well as the sights and sounds of creepy crawlies whose only intent was to bite, sting or suck my blood, all blended into a nightmare of horror. The fact that we encountered nothing more dangerous than a wild boar was neither here nor there as on the fifth and final day we all staggered into the base camp very thankful to still be alive; even more thankful to be a Naval Boy Seaman on a five day patrol rather than a National Serviceman on constant jungle patrols.”

**Stoker Peter Howie** was yet another who served ashore. “Apart from the fact that I was unfortunate enough to be selected for one of those notorious *jungle adventure* jaunts with our Army comrades, all my memories of Malaya are pleasant ones.

“Compensation came in the form of the visits we made to the rubber plantations when, though dressed and armed for battle, we were still well received by the owners and their families. After the mandatory tour of the plantation and rubber processing sheds we were then welcomed into the family residence where we were treated to vast quantities of ice cold Tiger beer and tables groaning under the weight of the most sumptuous food. How well we could have defended ourselves had we been attacked as we returned to the ship in the dark hours does not bear thinking about.

“I recall one occasion when, following a particularly hard day, the skipper, Commander Robertson decided we would drop anchor at an isolated cove. The boats were then lowered to ferry most of the ship’s company to the nearest beach. We were armed with various firearms and three members of the duty watch were detailed to take up positions along the edge of the jungle to act as lookouts.

“Though we were very conscious of the possible risk of unwelcome guests, we organised a beach cricket competition which I would like to believe was won by we stokers. It proved to be a fantastic morale booster for everyone except our three lookouts who no doubt questioned the probability of there being many Communist guerrillas on an island two miles long by a mile wide.”

Ordinary Seaman Peter Cawley also spent time ashore but for other reasons. “I was drafted from CONSORT to HMS TERROR (the Royal Navy shore base in Singapore), and was to travel by train to Singapore. It was just at the beginning of the Malayan Emergency and apart from all the safeguards being taken against bandit attacks, I was completely confused by the Army bloke who kept telling me to, ‘Change at Kayel’. I couldn’t find Kayel on the train schedule so I nearly managed to miss my train. After discovering Kayel was the abbreviation for Kuala Lumpur, I climbed back on board and headed south for what was a long train journey, made even longer by the bandits trying to blow up a couple of bridges on the way.”

CONSORT spent much of her time patrolling the waters along the Malayan coast and Sub-Lieutenant William Robson remembered some of these patrols. “We went south (from Japan) in company with CONCORD to Singapore. Once there we established two patrols, one on the east coast of Malaya, the other on the west. A spin of the coin decided that CONCORD should have the east coast and CONSORT the west. Our aim was to prevent the terrorists doing anything by sea and on the west coast, to prevent gun-running from Sumatra. Many junks were stopped and many smelly fish holds searched without result. I think the truth was that the terrorists already had more than enough weapons anyway. During World War 2 they had fought on the Allied side and had been well supplied.

“We spent almost two months on the coast and, as a sort of finale, it was arranged with the local Army commander

that we should do a bombardment of some presumed terrorist positions in the jungle. The Army would then move in and mop up. As arranged, the bombardment started at 0700 the next morning and when completed we repaired to a late breakfast, confident of a job well done. Needless to say, the Captain had not told the Flag Officer, the Admiral in Singapore about this little operation. I am sure our Captain thought, probably rightly, that if he had told the Admiral he would have stopped it.

“The next morning the Admiral picked up his copy of *The Straits Times*. There on the front page was a large picture of CONSORT with her gun barrels wreathed in smoke and with a banner headline proclaiming: DESTROYER BOMBARDS TERRORISTS. We were due to return to Singapore to start a six week refit. As the Dockyard came under the same Admiral our refit did not get off to a very good start.”

Whilst on station in Malaya, CONSORT was also involved in morale-boosting exercises ashore. Terry Hodgins was involved in one of these, a football match between the ship and the locals. “The ship’s football team plus supporters were despatched in two heavy lorries from Port Dixon for the sole purpose of playing a *Showing the Flag* match against what was described as a *local team*.

“Heartened by the thoughts of footie, booze and birds, we set out for Kuala Lumpur on a back-breaking journey, safe in the knowledge that not only was Leading Seaman Tug Wilson riding *shotgun* with his Lanchester at the ready, but also in the back of our lorry we also had Bill Sykes and Mick Spence, our two full backs pointing their .303 rifles at anything that moved, and threatening to *fix bayonets* if the need arose.

“On finally arriving in Kuala Lumpur some three hours later we were shocked to discover that our game of football, CONSORT vs LOCALS had been heavily advertised as ROYAL NAVY vs K.L. ALL STARS and



that the match was being played in the city's main stadium before a *sell-out* crowd.

“The result of the match was an unbelievable 2-2 DRAW. We would have lost by at least 6 goals had it not been for an amazing display by our goalkeeper Taff Austin. He was carried from the pitch shoulder high by the locals to loud shouts of ARSENAL! ARSENAL! ARSENAL! Taff was not at all flattered as he was an ardent SPURS supporter! Following the game we were treated like royalty with the Tiger beer flowing like water.

“Time came to stagger back through the darkness and find the lorries, but the supporters' lorry had left nearly an hour before ours due to our legless leader, Tug Wilson making a long speech about fighting to the death if we were attacked as well as insisting on singing at least two verses of his favourite song, ‘Preacher in the Dockyard Church.’ With more time wasted trying to find the Lanchester and rifles thoughtfully concealed under the driver's seat, time was definitely not on our side. Then, when Tug decided he wanted to sing the remaining four verses of his song on the way back, he thrust the Lanchester into my hands because I was the closest and told me to get in the cab with the driver.

“As we set off, I was feeling quite chuffed to be sitting in the front with the gun making grooves in my knees, but it was quite entertaining to be listening to the comments and dirty songs coming from the back. We had covered ten miles on the jungle road when we hit a foot deep crater and the Lanchester took on a life of its own, exploding into action and shattering the roof of the cab together with the Indian driver's confidence. He let out a blood curling scream before shooting off into the undergrowth at the speed of light. He was only just ahead of the lads in the back of the lorry.

“When we finally reassembled, a near sober Tug Wilson took me aside, grabbed me by the throat and gently explained that I would be hanging off the end of a deck

scraper for the rest of my time in CONSORT if I didn't listen carefully. I was to forget about having the Lanchester and leave all the talking to him. This I was more than happy to agree to.

“As amazing as it may seem, only *our leader*, Tug Wilson was called upon to give a full report to the Skipper on what had befallen us. The buzz was that Commander Robertson was more than a little doubtful as to the accuracy of the report. When the question arose as to the number of bullet holes in the roof of the driver's cab, Tug quickly replied, ‘The cunning little sods were sitting up in the palm trees like Jap snipers!’ The Skipper's coughing fit got louder and there were tears of laughter in his eyes when he commended Tug and the rest of the ship's football team for their bravery. We heard later that there was much hilarity in the officer's wardroom when they sat down to dinner that evening.

“There should always be a happy ending and I am glad to report that Tug didn't lumber me with that deck scraper and I was *promoted* to Captain's Flat sweeper instead. As for Leading Seaman Tug Wilson, he returned home to Plymouth just a year later to enjoy his well-deserved pension.”

Tom Flanagan found that the tour of duty in Malaya soon became somewhat tiresome and repetitive. “We spent a lot of time ferrying troops to and from their assignments, and laying down a barrage or two at the request of the Army. We also shadowed Russian ships to make sure they were not running guns or ammunition to the bandits. This job was amusing for we would close up at night and at first light we would fall back out of sight, each side knowing what was happening.

“We would be given time off for R & R (rest and recreation) at places like Penang or Langivy Island, beautiful spots that would cost a fortune to go there today. Singapore was where we celebrated the Christmas of

1948.”

As with all ships in the Navy, CONSORT had her own memorable characters, distinct individuals who stood out for one reason or another from the rest of the ship’s complement. Besides Tug Wilson, one of these other characters was *Scurs* Bentley who was also the ship’s *snob*. Leading Seaman Ron Howell remembered him well. “*Scurs* Bentley was an Able Seaman – the nickname *Scurs* was because of his very prolific beard, *scurs* being a terminology for whiskers. He was the ship’s *snob*, not a reference to any haughty behaviour but due to his sideline on board. Members of ships companies are allowed to apply for permission to start up a *firm* to provide a service to their shipmates, thus there would be a business sideline to wash clothes; someone with a pair of scissors and a little skill would cut hair. A *snob* is an old English term for a shoe mender, something which Bentley did very well, hence he was the ship’s *snob*.”

Accidents sometimes happened on board CONSORT. Working in any ship could be hazardous, particularly in the engine and boiler rooms with their confined spaces and moving machinery. John English was involved in one of these accidents. “On watch in the boiler room I was ordered to check the gauge and valve on the top super-heated drum. As I approached the valve the glass tube exploded permitting steam to escape. I suffered three incisions from the glass tube which required our Sick Berth Attendant, Don Locket to stitch up.”

Boy Seaman Jim Finch was another who met with an accident which was caused by a careless moment. “We were in Singapore for refit. I was rigging staging on the funnel ready for work to begin and had gone up inside the funnel. I was black as a crow. While I was on the funnel the Petty Officer Telegraphist asked me if I could disconnect the aerials attached to the funnel. The shackles were a bit stiff and I forgot the *golden rule*, one hand for yourself and

one for the Navy. I used both hands to try and free the shackle and lost my balance.

“I fell and finished up jammed between the funnel and the vegetable locker. The wire mesh broke, cushioning the fall. I freed myself and went and sat on the falls reel under the whaler (feeling a little dazed), where someone saw me. They obviously thought they had better get me to sick bay and they picked me up, hitting my head hard on the keel of the whaler and knocking me out. When I woke up I was in the sick bay. There was no permanent damage and after a week’s leave I was back to normal.”

Tropical heat and poor diet also caused ailments and once again John English was to suffer. “Lack of vegetables led to my having a severe acne rash over my back which bled and stuck to the shirt. The Naval cure for this was ‘Gentian Violet’ which failed to cure the complaint. Leading Stoker Tom Ash asked if I wanted it cured the tried old way. He instructed me to stand in the shower with the water running the hottest that I could bear, and at the same time rubbing my back hard to open all the pores and remove the acne heads. I then ran down to the mess, lay face down on my stomach with both arms and legs held down. A large amount of ‘Pussers Vinegar’ (acetic acid) was then poured over my back; the pain was excruciating and after releasing me, I ran around the deck a couple of times to cool off. Needless to say the acne was cured and I’ve never had a spot on my back since.”

Christmas Day in Singapore (1948) was one Tom Flanagan would remember as a very *revealing* day, at least where he himself was concerned. “Christmas dinner over and done with and suitably stuffed, we were lazing on the deck when a couple of Motor Torpedo Boats (MTB’s) decided to pinch our ship’s boats moored alongside. We tried to thwart their attempts by repelling them with hose pipes but somehow they managed to take our boats and tie them to buoys all over the harbour.

“It was left to us to retrieve them, and thinking no more of it, a few of us dived into the water and swam to the boat moored nearest, which happened to be the motorboat. Having finally reached and started the motorboat we went to collect the whaler, at the same time picking up swimmers along the way, some of whom were beginning to flounder a bit. Very soon the motorboat began to settle lower in the water, so we had to transfer some into the whaler and tow them back to CONSORT.

“On the way back we passed a passenger/merchant ship. Someone casually remarked that if we boarded her on Christmas Day they would have to give us a drink. What better excuse could we need? After dropping off the whaler and some of our shipmates back on board CONSORT we decided to board the other ship.

“To our amazement, as we neared the gangway the crew stood welcoming us with open arms. Being dressed for life aboard a warship in the steamy heat of Singapore, wearing shorts that hid little or nothing, we must have made a fine sight for the watching passengers. Our main interest however was in the booze, so we were delighted when the Engineering Officer greeted us and led us down to his mess deck and began doling out very generous portions of *Xmas Spirit*.

“Soon it was time to leave our generous hosts and of course myself being something of a show-off, I decided to disembark the ship in style. The deck from which we were leaving was quite high and was a sufficient invitation for me to try one of my fancy dives. I had always loved high diving but there was no place on CONSORT high enough to satisfy me. I thought this was ideal to do a bit of *posing*, especially with the ladies watching.

“Balancing on the ship’s rail, as all the other lads left via the gangway, my pose was suitably impressive to capture the attention of most of the passengers who were gathered to say goodbye. I completed a splendid stylish pike and into

a swallow dive, and on coming to the surface of the water received a nice round of applause. I don't know if the applause was for the merit of the dive, or because in the completion of the dive my skimpy shorts had come off and there, before them in all his glory, was Flanagan *skinny dipping*. After retrieving my shorts and much to the delight of the passengers and crew, I struggled trying to get them back on. On completing the task I then climbed aboard the motorboat and off we chugged. I say chugged because we were well overloaded with drunken CONSORTs, all merrily waving to the crew and passengers as we made our way back to our ship. I suppose it was a case of, 'Twice around the harbour and back in time for tea,' and the memory of a very enjoyable Christmas Day!"

"At the end of February (1949)," recalled Sub-Lieutenant William Robson, "we again headed north to Shanghai. As we came up the river we found the best berth occupied by a large U.S. cruiser. This in former days would have been reserved for the China Fleet. We went to a buoy just upstream and further on was a French sloop which became friends of ours. The weather was very cold and dank."

Art Pearse's recollections of Shanghai were mixed ones. "Shanghai was an interesting run ashore. The Union Jack Club was a sort of leftover from the old days with pictures on its walls of many of the old warships from the days of our fathers and grandfathers. Electrical Artificer Sam Hoare and I often spent time in the Park Hotel, sitting in wicker chairs and paying thousands of 'paper' dollars for our drinks. So this is inflation. Russian princesses (or so they claimed) abounded and no one seemed too worried about the Communists getting here. The pavements were full of U.S. aid for sale. Corruption? The port area was full of shipping from all around the world and despite the fast flowing river we were warned about thieving boys using the portholes to enter the ship."

William Robson also had distinct memories of the city. “Shanghai prided itself on being an amazing city and with some justification. It was probably at that time the most prosperous city in Asia. It had the tallest buildings in Asia strung along the Bund, the road that ran along the waterfront, and was the fourth largest port in the world. It had a wonderful lifestyle and a lurid night-life. It was a noisy, bustling city. Shanghai, however, when we got there was in somewhat subdued form, with the Communists not far away. There was a curfew which fell at 10 p.m.

“One thing that had not changed though was the kindness and hospitality shown to the Royal Navy wherever we went. Everywhere, the ship’s officers were made honorary members of every possible club, almost without exception. In Shanghai, even the doors of the exclusive Shanghai Club were open to us. A feature of the club system throughout the Far East was that it operated on a chit system. No money changed hands. You signed a chit (receipt) for everything. At the end of the month, or before the ship departed port, all the chits came home to roost and were settled. In Shanghai, the settlement of such bills had been taken over by the office of the Resident Naval Officer. The local Chinese national currency, the Gold Yuan was plummeting (because of the civil war being fought between the Nationalists and the Communists), and by the time our bills were settled, one got thousands of Gold Yuan for the pound. My ten days of doing myself well ashore cost me the equivalent of about fifty pence!

“Our time at Shanghai was running out. We were to be the next guard ship at Nanking and were expected to be there for about four weeks. So, one day, we slipped down to Woosung where the fleet tanker, GREEN RANGER was and filled up to the gun whales with oil fuel before returning to Shanghai and then to Nanking.”

CONSORT would soon find herself an unwilling participant in the middle of a full-scale civil war. Within a

short period of time the destroyer was to go into action, almost unexpectedly, and she would receive her first battle casualties. The brief incident in which she was to participate would add HMS CONSORT's name to the proud and often bloodied history of the Royal Navy. It would also help to enshrine in those who served aboard her, the ship's motto: *Loyal and Steadfast*.

*We thank you, Lord for all our food,  
For everything you make is good.  
You chose to fill our lives with joys,  
Whether Ganges or St. Vincent boys.  
But you must have wished for us to suffer,  
Why else did you create the 'Buffer'? Amen.*



## INCIDENT ON THE YANGTZE

Sub-Lieutenant William Robson like so many others on board ship remembered this period in Nanking well. "It always seemed to me a little strange that we should maintain a guard ship at Nanking. Admittedly, it was the diplomatic capital of Nationalist China and I'm sure that with the turmoil, (a full-scale civil war was being fought between the Nationalists who controlled the country and the Communists who wanted to take control), our ambassador must have felt isolated there. Admittedly too, the White Ensign carried enormous weight but what a small ship's company of 160 were supposed to do in the face of armies who counted themselves in millions is open to conjecture.

"It is perhaps an appropriate moment to look at the map and to make some comments. Shanghai is situated on the Whangpoo River; twelve miles down at a place called Woosung it joins the Yangtze River which at that point is a wide estuary. If you proceed up the Yangtze there are two obvious anchorages, the first is Kiangyin about eighty miles from Woosung while another fifty miles brings you to Chinkiang; Nanking is a further thirty five miles on with passages of the river usually made at twelve knots.

"We left Shanghai at 0600 on 21st March and at 0900 we went to Action Stations – mine being Officer of the Watch. The reason for this precaution was that the south bank of the river was held by the Nationalists from whom we had clearance, but parts of the north bank were Communist held. We had our guns trained fore and aft and the gun crews out of sight, but our director control position was ever watchful. It was a pleasant day. The country to the north was flat with occasional trees and far away in the distance was a low line of hills. The country on the south bank was fairly featureless. We arrived at Chinkiang at 1700 after an uneventful passage of about 150 miles. Next

morning we left at 0630 and got to Nanking without incident at 1000. There we found HMCS CRESCENT, a Canadian destroyer who departed that afternoon leaving us to our own resources.

“We were berthed alongside at Hodgee on the outskirts of Nanking. Here there was a compound of about forty acres with a high fence and a gate on which we placed a sentry. Inside the compound were several warehouses, one of which had been converted into a canteen and a football pitch had been laid out by previous visitors. It was deemed that there was no suitable entertainment for sailors in Nanking, although some tours of the city were organised – and so we brought with us enough bottled beer to provide the canteen for the next four weeks. The Naval authorities had made a large advance to the Canteen Fund to buy the beer and this debt would be run down as the beer was drunk. We would still have to take the empties back to cash in.

“Nanking, as I have already mentioned was the diplomatic capital of Nationalist China. As far as I can remember only Great Britain, the United States, Australia, Canada and France were represented. Russia was of course on the other side and backing the Chinese Communists. This meant that there were a somewhat limited number of people to take part in the round of diplomatic entertainment which usually meant at least two cocktail parties and a dinner at which many of the same people attended. This meant also that the arrival of a new guard ship provided not only a breath of fresh air but a source of new talent, or so we prided ourselves.

“During our visit we were invited to many of these functions so that only the Officer of the Day was left on board CONSORT. Fortunately, the diplomats were an amusing lot and we enjoyed ourselves. The chief comedian was undoubtedly the Canadian Military Attaché, a Major-General. I remember him saying, ‘I always wanted to be an

actor but I joined the Army instead, and have been acting ever since.’ He was always good for a turn after dinner. He would put on his dinner jacket back-to-front, reverse his collar and address a sermon as if in an English country church to, ‘Pat-a-cake, pat-a-cake, baker’s man – bake me a cake as fast as you can.’

“Our outdoor sports were more limited. We tried taking the motor boat to the nearby duck shooting grounds but these were also near the Communist held areas and we experienced the occasional rifle shot. We reverted to the snipe in the suburban paddy fields of Nanking which doubled as sewage stations. I think our Captain was the only one who persisted. There was also a golf course in the low hills nearby with sand greens. We did not favour this much.

“On board CONSORT, both the inside and the outside of the ship were cleaned and burnished until it sparkled like a diamond. Every day, too, we went to Action Stations and practiced gun drills, damage control and repairs”.

To relieve the partial boredom of CONSORT’s stay in Nanking a ship’s Inter-Part Soccer Championship was held in which Leading Seaman Denis (Bungy) Williams was one of those who took part. “The Championship comprised six teams and was won by the Seamen who defeated the Stokers by 3 goals to 1 in a rousing final. Stoker Flanagan received 5 official warnings for over boisterous tackles but I was able to better this with 6 official warnings which contributed to my winning the Man of the Match award for outstanding courage in the face of severe intimidation by the Stokers!”

For William Robson and the others on board ship their stay in Nanking finally came to an end. “Eventually our time drew to a close and on our last night we gave a concert party. A stage was rigged in the warehouses, seats were arranged and the high diplomats were invited to occupy the chairs in the first two rows. I played the bag pipes and

played three simple tunes. This seemed a very reasonable way out for me as I suffer from chronic stage fright. I suppose this is the last time the pipes have been played in Nanking.

“At the interval the canteen had been transformed into Nanking’s answer to the Crush Bar at Covent Garden. There, our ship’s company rubbed shoulders with the elite of the diplomatic corps with an easy and sure touch. At one stage a very smart leading seaman from Northern Ireland came up to me and said, ‘Do you think there will be a fight tomorrow, sir?’ I expressed the thought that we might perhaps get down river without being shot at. He looked disappointed. There was something of an end of term feeling as we walked back to the ship through the spring night.”

Boy Seaman Terry Hodgins also took part in the evening’s events which became known as the ‘Nanking Follies’. There was much *behind the scenes* work needed to be done in the weeks leading up to the Follies. “The Skipper agreed when he realised it could be a way of injecting new life into a ship’s company whose high points over the last two months were comprised of cleaning the ship and night guard duty. Responsibility was handed to Surgeon Lieutenant Mark Bentley who became tremendously keen and enthusiastic.

“The Doc’s first move was to enlist the aid of Petty Officer Bunny (Taff) Austin and Leading Electrician Bob Morgan whose prime job was to whip up enthusiasm from the lower deck and to pin up a notice in the Canteen flat requesting any volunteers, talented or not, to report to the Captain’s flat on the following day for registration. As I was the Captain’s flat sweeper, I was promoted to *Entertainment Officer’s* clerk. Things didn’t look promising at the end of that registration day.

“With his appeal for volunteers obviously having fallen on deaf ears the Doc quickly realised his only hope was

bribery, and the co-operation of the First Lieutenant who would hopefully agree that any member of the ship's company selected for the Concert Party would be *excused duty* for every day of concert rehearsals, scheduled to last for at least two full weeks. When the new notice was pinned up the next day the main anxiety was trying to hold back the hordes trying to hammer down the door of the Captain's flat.

"How well I remember that first day which saw the start of so many careers in 'Show Biz', and caused Doc Bentley so many problems in breaking the bad news to at least two thirds of the volunteers that they would have to reapply in about two years' time. In the meantime it was back to chipping decks or cleaning the funnel.

"This was obviously not well received by some and it was the *poor losers* amongst them who gathered at the gangway each day of the rehearsals and as the *Artistes* stepped ashore, whistled and hollered that we were all a bunch of sailors whose sexual preferences were to be seriously questioned! I do not remember much about the daily rehearsals at the Consulate in Nanking, except to say that attending them was a vast improvement on cleaning ship. I do remember though the chorus line comprising four good looking blokes in best whites and four even better looking blokes dressed as Hawaiian dancers complete with coconut shells and grass skirts. The opening tune was, 'We are the Consortinies, Happy Girls and Boys.' The Doc's constant order was 'bounce and smile'. Blondie Whitcombe was one of the Hula dancers. Those in the chorus line included John Brewer, Jesse Grieve, and naturally, yours truly. Other notable input came from David Richardson and his Golden Trumpet; Peter Howie and his Magic Mouth Organ; and dizzy Derek Roberts who was no mean drummer. The Nanking Follies was destined to be a 'one off' show but it is a memory that will remain with me for the rest of my days."

Art Pearce was becoming alarmed at the worsening situation. "There seemed to be a continual stream of small boats going upriver – evacuees and some Nationalist soldiers. Sam Hoare and I picked up the Shanghai papers daily to keep track of what was happening and there were almost continuous reports that the Communists had crossed the Yangtze at various places." He also noted, "the beer ran out on the 16th."

"The ship was due to leave Nanking the following afternoon after the 'Follies'," recalled William Robson. "It may be remembered that on our way up the river we spent the night at Chinkiang, thirty five miles from Nanking. This was not considered a safe anchorage, the nearest one being Kiangyin some eighty five miles from the capital. All passages had to be made in daylight and it was obvious that it would not be possible for our relief, HMS AMETHYST to make passage to Nanking and for us to sail for Kiangyin and get there before dark. A scheme was therefore devised which meant that CONSORT would sail from Nanking at 1300 on 20th April to arrive at Kiangyin at 1900. AMETHYST would reach Nanking at 1500. There would thus be a gap of about two hours when there would be no guard ship but the Ambassador accepted this. It was decided that an officer would be left behind to meet AMETHYST. He would be armed with the elementary documentation we had and would show them where the canteen and football ground were and give a rundown of the local fraternity, something perhaps best done verbally. On completion, he would catch the night train to Shanghai and wait for CONSORT to arrive. I was detailed for this duty and I must say I rather looked forward to it. I liked trains. HMS LONDON was in Shanghai; her sub-lieutenant was a friend of mine, and I would go on board and take lunch with him.

"The morning of the departure day started uneventfully. The Captain went ashore early and came back in time for

Colours at 0800, having collected six snipe. Things were very soon to change dramatically when shortly after 1000 we intercepted a signal from AMETHYST: 'Am aground and under heavy fire. Large number of casualties'. There was also a position given which was about fifty miles downriver from us.

"This was taken to the Captain and the Signalman was told to show it to all the officers. I read it and re-read it. There could be no doubt and there was only one thing to do. I went to the Captain and said, 'I assume now I will be coming with the ship, sir.' There was of course nothing heroic in this. It was where my place was and anyway, I didn't want to be left behind in Nanking. He said, 'Of course,' and went off to see the Ambassador who agreed that we should go to the assistance of AMETHYST as soon as we could get underway. He also decreed that the rules of engagement would be that we would respond if fired upon.

"At this time *Action Working* dress had just been introduced. This consisted of heavy dark blue jean trousers and a heavy cotton shirt of a lighter blue. This had been issued to all ratings but not to the officers. They dressed themselves for the battle in normal blue uniform, reefer jacket, trousers, stiff collar and tie. Those in exposed positions were issued with tin helmets. The officers must have presented a somewhat old fashioned appearance reminiscent of the World War 2 sea battles. I put an extra three clean handkerchiefs in my pocket!

"We managed to get away shortly after 1130. As we left we jettisoned about 700 cases of empty beer bottles which had been carefully lashed on deck earlier that morning – the financial reserves of the Canteen Fund. As they drifted astern on the current a swarm of sampans descended like vultures on this amazing little treasure trove. We had also painted two large Union Jacks on our side (port and starboard), and hoisted seven White Ensigns. There could be no doubt as to our identity, although the latter may have

seemed somewhat provocative to the Communist Chinese.

“After leaving, lunch still seemed to be going on. The Chinese cook always did us well and although I had no great appetite I decided to eat – not exactly knowing when the next meal would come. As soon as lunch was over the wardroom was turned into our hospital and, where we had lunched became the operating table.

“On the way upriver to Nanking at action stations I had been Officer of the Watch but today, since it was assumed I would not be going with the ship someone else had been given that position. Instead, I was in general charge of the after part of the ship, with particular responsibility for the emergency steering arrangements. I went off and supervised the laying out of wires for towing aft. By now we were doing 28 knots, an average that we maintained until AMETHYST was sighted at 1345. We had just completed the towing arrangements and I was standing on the quarterdeck when a shell dropped astern of us. We were suddenly under fire and in action. I remember thinking, ‘But this is peacetime’.”

For Terry Hodgins the morning began as just the routine of yet another day aboard ship. “When CONSORT was in harbour, as we obviously were in Nanking, my part of ship duty was as the ‘Captain’s flat sweeper which made me responsible for the cleanliness of the area outside the Captain’s cabin as well as the very large trophy cabinet, the contents of which had to be kept dazzlingly bright at all times on pain of death! I enjoyed the responsibility because it was *mine alone*, with the added bonus of having a close ear to all that went on in the Skipper’s cabin. I also developed a friendship with the Captain’s messenger whose job it was to beat a continuous and well-worn path from the Wireless Transmitting office to the Captain with the signals received by the ship from here, there and everywhere. The messenger’s name was Ordinary Seaman Chris Hutton who was destined to die in the Yangtze Incident and whose



death affected me more than any other.

“On the day in question, April 20th, spirits were high as the weather had started to get considerably warmer and, best of all, we knew that AMETHYST would soon be arriving to relieve us as guard ship. Everyone’s thoughts were on getting back to Hong Kong and, for some, the even happier thought that they would soon be on their way home to their families. It was a day that dawned bright and clear and I was busy polishing my trophies when Chris Hutton, carrying his clipboard tore past me without a word and went straight into the Captain’s cabin. The very fact that he hadn’t knocked on the door before entering set the alarm bells ringing for me and this was confirmed when he quickly emerged and whispered the words, ‘The balloons gone up’, before clattering down the steps to the Canteen Flat below. That was to be the last I would ever see of him and it fills me with a great sadness whenever I think of that moment.

“My action station was in ‘Y’ gun and I was one of the loaders whose job it was to hump the heavy 4.5-inch shells between hoist and gun turret before popping them into the breach. I thus found myself at my action station clad in number 8 dress, steel helmet and protective anti-flash gear. With others clearing the upper deck for imminent action, we cast off and sped down the Yangtze in answer to AMETHYST’s appeal for assistance. I remember feeling uncomfortably hot in the anti-flash gear but even with the knowledge that I would soon be in action, I felt more excitement than fear. I distinctly recall however taking a flat tin that had once contained duty free cigarettes from my back pocket and transferring it quietly to my breast pocket. On the previous evening we had seen an Audie Murphy western film and it was his sheriff’s badge pinned over his heart that had blunted the bullet and saved his life!”

**Boy Seaman Jess Grieve** was another who recalled the excitement of the ship’s departure from Nanking. “I

remember being thrilled at the speed we were doing in the confined waters of the river; also being affected by the feeling of urgency. My action station was as bridge messenger, as I had done many times before for exercises but this time it was for real.”

Ordinary Seaman George ‘Andy’ Andrews who had just turned eighteen, having been promoted from Boy Seaman remembered, “We immediately got underway to go to AMETHYST’s assistance at 32 knots with a following tide run of some seven knots.”

When CONSORT came under fire a short time later it was a strange, perhaps unreal experience for many of the crew who had never seen action before. Ordinary Seaman Joe Tootell was in the wheelhouse. “I could not see the action. We could *hear* the ship taking severe punishment. When the wheelhouse took a direct hit, killing the Coxswain, Chief Petty Officer Gurney, and myself receiving multiple shrapnel wounds, the steering mechanism was put out of action.”

Able Seaman Jock Shaw had a lucky escape. “I was entrusted with the wheelhouse steering along with Chief Petty Officer Gurney for the dash from Nanking, having only just been relieved by Joe Tootell shortly before the wheelhouse was hit.”

As bridge messenger Jess Greive was at his action station when the bridge was also hit by enemy fire. “We had two local pilots on the bridge, one was hit and wounded right alongside of me and the other was only kept in place by one of the officers who was pointing a revolver. The Captain was also wounded but despite his uniform being in tatters and his left side bleeding profusely, he remained on station. I was sent to find the Medical Officer but he was already up to his elbows tending casualties in the Wardroom which was being used as an emergency operating area.

“As I made my way, I remember seeing the outer

bulkhead repeatedly exploding inward with shell hits sending shrapnel flying through the air. As I went forward my legs turned to jelly and I honestly thought that every moment was to be my last. I found myself in the port passage outside the Transmitting station which had taken a direct hit, creating a scene of twisted metal and fire. I tried to pull out one casualty and saw that his arm was held to the metal by a single sinew. I tried cutting him free with my seaman's knife but it wasn't sharp enough to free him. Did I leave him or did someone come and help? I honestly don't know. I can only believe that all my movements and actions throughout the action were directed by someone's orders, but whose I don't know. Where I was going or where I had been I knew not. I was then transferred to a towing line party along with Leading Seaman Reg Hallam and Ordinary Seaman Taff Madden in order to transfer the towing line to AMETHYST. I was detailed to heave the line."

William Robson knew the ship was in deep trouble when he learned that both the wheelhouse and bridge had been hit by the Communist shore batteries. "We heard the battle going on above as CONSORT tried to silence the shore batteries. Presently came the order, 'Switch to emergency steering.' This meant disconnecting the steering engine from all its leads to the wheelhouse and working it by the smaller steering wheel in the Tiller flat in accordance with orders passed verbally to the Tiller flat by a chain of ratings with the steering orders passed from one man to the next until it finally got to those below. This was very soon done and seemed to be working smoothly.

"And then a fear overcame me. Perhaps both the Captain and/or his Damage Control officer had been killed or badly wounded, and while everyone believed them to be in control they had been incapacitated – with dire results for the ship. I decided to go up to the bridge. As I made my way forward along the upper deck it occurred to me that if

all the officers in the forward part of the ship were killed or badly wounded I (only a Sub-Lieutenant) might be in command.

“On my way up to the bridge I passed the wheelhouse. It really was in shambles. On the bridge, things seemed to be somewhat better. Though the Captain had been wounded by shrapnel he was obviously in complete control of the situation and sitting on his high bridge chair. He must never know what thoughts had been going through my mind. I had to find some reason for being there, some formula for a report. ‘We have switched over to emergency steering, sir,’ I told him. He must have been very well aware of this. ‘And all is well aft,’ I finished rather lamely. I then withdrew to the back of the bridge and looked around.

“I do not remember seeing AMETHYST. I suspect she was just around the corner of the river. Nor do I remember seeing the guns ashore. I do remember seeing a wide creek on the north bank absolutely crammed with large junks. There must have been about forty of them and each I suppose could have packed in 500 soldiers or perhaps even double that for so short a journey as they would have had. There was no further reason to remain on the bridge and I decided to return to the Tiller flat.”

Leading Telegraphist Ken Miller was busy relaying reports continuously to HMS LONDON. His action station was in the Wireless Transmitting office. “I was on watch with Ordinary Telegraphist Dennis Iredale. We knew when the bridge was hit by the amount of debris coming down the voice pipe. A shell burst alongside the main transmitter and put it out of action together with the power. Dennis was hit with shrapnel in the back so I laid him out as best as possible. I tried tuning the low power transmitter but failed to realise that the trunking in the Captain’s flat, which housed the aerial feeds had been damaged. I then went aft to see if I could assist Telegraphist Dolan with the emergency transmitter but without success. I then returned

to W/T office where Dennis was in a bad way and I was still unable to get in touch with LONDON or anyone else. When we finally made it to a safe berth, a doctor came and attended to Dennis but sadly he did not recover.”

Andy Andrews had a lucky escape during the battle. “A message came over my headset that the forward guns were not receiving ammunition fast enough and I was then ordered to leave the Transmission station (the gunnery control position) and go to the forward magazine to give them a hand. I later discovered that less than two minutes after I had left the Transmission station, it received a direct hit from a high explosive shell that had penetrated the bulkhead where I had been standing and the whole T.S. crew were killed.”

Terry Hodgins too was in the thick of it from the very beginning when the ship initially came under fire. “The first doubts arose when, much further down the river, I happened to glance astern and saw giant spouts of water gushing skywards and getting ever closer to where I was standing. The doubts intensified when I heard the whine of large projectiles overhead and the distinct sound of bullets ricocheting from the superstructure around us. All of this gave me the uneasy feeling that I would soon be told it was time to leave the protection of the gun turret. On every run I made between the turret and the shell locker I had the distinct feeling of being completely at the mercy of our Chinese friends who could be clearly seen on the river bank.

“When suddenly there were no more shells to lift and load, I had the silly notion that we had emptied the after magazine but there appeared through the smoke the figure of Chief Gunnery Instructor Robinson who ordered two of us to get below at all speed. I only discovered that my companion was Boy Seaman Benny Bound when we landed in a tangled heap on the deck of the magazine, the two of us having been thrown from the ladder following a

tremendous explosion above us.

“We immediately started loading shells on to the hoist, and in the confines of the magazine it was thankfully impossible to see what was going on above, and that the ship was turning to make another attempt to haul AMETHYST off the mud bank where she lay grounded. I remember very little about the remainder of the action except that it seemed to go on forever and it was obvious the ship could not survive many more direct hits.”

Leading Seaman Ron Howell quickly realised CONSORT's return fire against the shore batteries was proving ineffective. “My own action station was in the 275 Gunnery Radar, but due to the vast expanse of the river and its low-lying banks there was nothing of any height to produce an echo that would indicate a bearing and range on the radar screens in order to direct the 4.5-inch guns on to the target. The result of this was that when we eventually engaged the well concealed enemy gun batteries, all our guns were firing *over* and visual sighting therefore had to be made. Being surplus to requirements, I found myself, along with the other two members of the 275 crew working as gun loaders for the crew of the starboard Bofors. As the gun hardly stopped firing throughout the action it was strenuous work.”

Below decks was not the safest place to be. The high explosive shells easily penetrated the ship's sides and Tom Flanagan found himself to be one of the casualties. “We were told to get down to the Seamen's mess deck which was badly holed just above the waterline. As well as plugging the gaping hole with hammocks to prevent an inflow of water we quenched a number of small fires that were filling the air with a dense black smoke. I was then glad to be ordered to return up top where some of us were put to work feeding ammunition to a Bofors gun. It was a nerve racking job as it required hoisting a box of shells on the shoulder before sprinting along the open deck whilst

being pursued by a stream of bullets immediately on emerging from cover. Not all of us were lucky enough to come through unscathed.

“After surviving a few runs and on returning to my action station, I was then called to the Canteen flat where the ammunition hoist had been hit and was found to be beyond repair. We erected a block and tackle to replace the hoist, with a direct lift from the Canteen flat and from the open magazine in the Stokers mess below it. We had to clear out the ammunition from the hoist – it was all over the deck, so we formed a chain of men from the Canteen flat to the forward 4.5-inch guns. We cleared all this loose ammunition from the deck to the guns. Having been hoisting ammunition by the block and tackle method for some time, the hoist suddenly stopped. We waited but nothing happened. I went down into the Stokers mess to find out why. There was a fire in the magazine. I quickly found a couple of extinguishers and returned to the magazine where there were two men dealing with the fire.

“As I waited, apart from praying, I was thinking could I take fire extinguishers into the magazine? If necessary, what if the fire was in danger of spreading to the ammunition and the magazine had to be flooded in order to save the ship? Would I need permission? Then I felt a sharp sting on the back of my left arm and touching the area, I found I was bleeding. As I turned to find where it had come from, I felt a sudden bang on my head and was knocked to the deck. Dazed, I felt my head to find that it too was bleeding. It was then I realised that all these pinging noises around me were incoming bullets and I quickly found somewhere safer to wait, praying that the fire would be put out quickly so I could get out of the Stokers mess. Suddenly the hoist carrying a box of ammunition started to rise and as it neared the deck head a small shell exploded close to the box. I decided there and then it was time I went back to the Canteen Flat. Within minutes of returning to the

hoist in the Canteen flat we heard that 'A' gun had been hit. We went to assist the wounded. We also heard that the wheelhouse had been completely destroyed and that they were rigging steering gear in the Tiller flat aft. We were no sooner back on the hoist when 'B' gun was hit and again we went to the assistance of the wounded."

Jock Shaw was at his action station as an ammunition handler for 'B' gun when it was hit. "I could see the muzzle flashes of the Chinese guns on the north bank. After we were hit I watched as Ordinary Seaman Jenkinson, the trainer was lifted from the gun mount after the shell had pierced it and then stretchered away. He later died of his wounds. We then transferred from 'B' gun to 'Y' gun and I clearly remember Mick Rowley standing abreast the funnel and shouting obscenities at the north bank."

For Tom Flanagan, "Personally the worst was yet to come. They say you never see the one that gets you, but suddenly the dim Canteen flat was filled with bright sunlight from the hole in the ship's side, and then an ear splitting explosion followed by the horrible feeling that I was melting from the feet upwards. I was blown forcefully backwards about ten feet, smashing my already sore head on the Canteen door. Looking around there was no one standing and I could hear the cries of others who had been in the vicinity of the explosion. I was still dazed and looking down, on my right knee was my big toe on a long piece of skin. I thought, what is that doing there? Then I looked down at my feet which were smashed, bloody and stripped of flesh. At that moment someone said, 'Are you okay?' As I had put new socks on that morning, I glanced at my feet and said, 'Look at that new stocking this morning,' but when I looked up he had gone.

"That was when I saw Tony Addis lying on the deck with fire burning very close to him. I put the fire out without realising what I had done. Tony had been walking behind me carrying a cordite charge when the shell



exploded and the charge went off in his arms, setting my clothes and hair smouldering; my boiler suit was burning my back and I was still trying to put out my hair as I crawled to the bulkhead door. I shouted for help and suddenly I could feel a pair of hands battering my back and head before lifting me up. I was carried through to the wardroom stairwell filled with more wounded. The man who had carried me to relative safety was Petty Officer Radio Electrician Ackhurst, killed shortly after when he returned to his Wireless Transmitting office. He saved my life and I will never forget that.

“The wardroom and stairwell were awash with blood. When Surgeon Lieutenant Bentley arrived at my side he explained that he would have to amputate immediately, to give me any chance of survival even though all his drugs and medical instruments had been blown to bits earlier. I learned later that he used a straight razor in cutting through my ankle joints to sever what was left of my right foot. He dressed what was left of my left stump. I must have passed out from the shock of it all because when I awoke in the semi-darkness, I was aware that someone was lying beside me. I discovered it was Stoker Selwyn Rose who had lost his left hand as well as suffering wounds to the neck and head. On my other side was Stoker Bill Davies whose hands and arms had been peppered with shrapnel.”

Besides CONSORT's commanding officer, the ship's doctor, **Surgeon Lieutenant Mark Bentley** had perhaps the most difficult job in the ship at this time. “More and more casualties were brought in to me and I had to work for about twenty minutes with a torch before emergency lighting could be rigged. I concentrated principally on controlling bleeding at once in all casualties, removing surface shrapnel where possible, cleaning the wounds and applying field dressings. I also carried out amputations where required. At one stage the Captain thought of attempting to land me on AMETHYST (which had

sustained numerous casualties to her own crew), but later changed his mind as we were unable to get close enough to her, and also our own rate of casualties was so high.

“During the action I had on several occasions to dash aft, to the bridge and wheelhouse. In the latter, a direct hit had blown off the Coxswain’s leg and he died immediately. The Quarter Master had then taken over but in a matter of seconds he was hit and couldn’t carry on. The steering was smashed and I could see we were heading for the bank. I shouted to the bridge but gathered they appreciated the fact as we went full astern and the after steering position was manned.

“The Wireless Transmitting office received a shell which exploded inside killing two outright and a third died later from severe blast effects. Later the T.S. office received a direct hit killing two instantaneously. In the small cross passage beneath the Captain’s day cabin three men were dismembered when a large shell exploded there. I saw all these cases, where, of course, nothing could be done.

“We withdrew from the action roughly two and a half hours after it commenced, and sailed about thirty miles downstream to a safe anchorage for the night and to rendezvous with HMS BLACK SWAN and later, HMS LONDON. At about 2000, BLACK SWAN met us and I managed to obtain some plasma from her. Her medical officer and that of HMAS SHOALHAVEN, who was aboard her, came across to help me give more individual attention to our casualties – by this time we had thirty one wounded in the wardroom.”

William Robson recalled that in the closing stages of the action, “The decision must have been made that we could do no more for AMETHYST, that we were in danger of becoming a total loss and must extricate ourselves. It was then that I felt the ship turn under full helm and head straight towards the nearby south bank. Almost at once I

felt the engines going full astern. The ship slowed down, nudged the mud but happily was soon moving backwards. Thankfully for the extreme skill of the Engine Room department we went from full ahead to full astern in one – no mean feat. The cause of this turn was that the gyro compass had been wrecked by a direct hit. This brought the action to a close. Arriving on the quarterdeck I saw an enormous wall of boiling dirty water (from shell splashes) following us.” One of these shells again threw CONSORT off her course and for the third time that day the ship was saved from becoming a permanent fixture in the Yangtze mud by the emergency full astern ordered by Commander Robertson and by the efforts of the Engine Room staff.

Though in extreme pain from his wounds Tom Flanagan felt, “A silence fall over the ship that I had never heard. All that could be heard was the steady throb of the engines. The silence lasted for such a long time, and finally we sighed for we realised we had made it to safety.”

Terry Hodgins too remembered the sudden quiet which filled the ship. “It (the action) seemed to go on forever and then suddenly it was quiet. We sat in our position below deck (in the magazine) for a long time thinking all kinds of fearful things until at last we heard the sound of the hatch opening above us and we scrambled into the light. I remember being appalled at the destruction that was all around and it hardly seemed possible that anyone could have survived. I thought of close friends who may not have survived...”

The ferocity of the battle was recorded in the closing paragraph of CONSORT’s official report to the Admiralty: *CONSORT was firing constantly with every gun at her disposal. According to Torpedo Officer Geoffrey Birch, CONSORT fired between three to four hundred 4.5-inch shells, plus a similar amount of smaller calibre shells at the Communist positions, knocking out eight gun emplacements. This degree of accuracy could not be*

*maintained once the calculator room (gunnery control) had been knocked out of action. Thereafter the gunners aboard CONSORT had to resort to direct fire through open sights to engage the PLA (People's Liberation Army) batteries.*

On a lighter note the Report also noted that some of those on board ship still retained their sense of humour: *As some wag (aboard ship) remarked, 'Might have been worse. It could have been raining.'* “It had been a perfectly glorious sunny day, almost too warm for the sort of work we'd had that afternoon...” recalled William Robson.

Sub-Lieutenant William Robson was also more than a little worried about the fate of those in his charge. “I was the Boys Divisional Officer. There were eight of them under the age of eighteen. I thought I would see how they had got on and went along to their mess deck. None had been injured and all seemed in good spirits and remarkably unmoved by the day's events. Best of all they gave me a cup of tea.”

Though CONSORT had now made good her withdrawal downriver, AMETHYST was to remain a prisoner on the Yangtze, a political pawn for 101 days until she made her own escape in a hazardous and daring night passage. It should be noted also that the heavy cruiser HMS LONDON and the sloop HMS BLACK SWAN endeavoured to come to the aid of AMETHYST but they too were forced back after sustaining casualties. Years later the ships would come together again as the Four Ships Association, bonded by those events of 20/21 April, 1949.

There was of course one last and sorrowful duty to be carried out by the crew of CONSORT. For William Robson it was a touching affair and a sad but final chapter to the action fought only a few short hours before. “Without any orders five of our older sailors took it upon themselves the business of sewing the bodies of the dead up in hammocks, fresh white hammocks drawn from the ship's stores. Francis Drake, after all, had a hammock for his shroud. It

was in the early hours of the next day before the job was done and ten white shapes were laid out in a neat row on deck. Dignity, we felt had been restored even if nothing else could be.”

Denis Williams was in charge of this sorrowful duty. “We gathered the bodies of the mortally wounded for burial and amongst them was Ordinary Seaman Chris Hutton, killed early in the action, and who had been our team, (the seamen’s) goalkeeper in the Inter-Part Soccer Championship final just a few days before.”

At 1200 William Robson and the other officers, “were summoned to the Captain’s cabin. Most of the side of the cabin had been blown out but a large sheet of canvas had been rigged over the gap. The cabin was also serving as the wardroom. We had all done very well, Commander Robertson said and he would be putting in recommendations for many decorations and awards. I am sure he was referring not just to the officers but to the whole ship’s company. If we had not all done very well we would not now be here having a nice drink. Incidentally, I think the sailors were enjoying an extra tot of rum.”

For Able Seaman Alan Quirk, “the saddest day was the funeral of our dead in Shanghai. I was twenty years old.”

“Back in Shanghai,” recalled William Robson, “the local ship repairers put patches on our shell holes in no time at all – in sharp contrast to the lethargic tempo of the Naval Dockyard in Singapore. We were at least watertight and there was nothing more we could do. We sailed for Hong Kong on 23rd April with no radar, no gyro compass, and with our emergency steering and engine room order systems. We did however have an echo sounder. I never forgot what it was like to feel the ship lift to the swell of the South China Sea. Somehow she had come to life again. The voyage was made at 20 knots and only once did we sight land. It was about 1830 and I was having a bath, another of the services which seemed improbably to be working. The

ship heeled over as we altered course and I looked out of the porthole to see a rocky and mist-covered bit of China. When I got dressed I went up to the bridge. On sighting land the Captain had said, 'At least we know where we are.' That was all. Next day we arrived in Hong Kong. We were the first back from the Yangtze and all the ships cheered us as we came in – an emotional, proud but sad moment.”

Terry Hodgins also felt great emotion in the reception given by the China Fleet. “When we eventually entered Hong Kong every ship, and there were a great many, cleared lower deck and I have never felt so proud and emotional as when the crew of every vessel lined the guard rails and cheered us as we passed. It was an unforgettable moment.”

The wounded had needed great care following the action and Mark Bentley remembered that, “Fourteen of the casualties (the more seriously injured) went to the American hospital ship REPOSE and the remaining I took down to Hong Kong in the ship. They were later transferred to the Royal Naval Hospital in Hong Kong. Those in REPOSE were transferred when they came down.”

Tom Flanagan, his feet amputated, was one of those transferred from REPOSE to the hospital. “After arrival I was examined by the medical staff. Unfortunately, the examination found that the skin on my right stump did not have enough padding to wear artificial limbs. My left leg had still not healed. They also took off the bandages from my arms, it was the first time I had seen them and they were in a bad state.

“One particular night I woke up with the sensation that I had an itch on my foot. I awoke sitting up scratching the empty space where my foot had been, the feeling was so real. That was the start of a very painful time; for days and days these pains would drive me to the edge although I knew I wasn't the only one experiencing pain as the ward

was full of wounded lads, with all sorts of wounds and suffering.

“Time went on with injections and dressing changes. The highlight for most of the CONSORT lads was the visit by the Skipper *doing the rounds* of the wounded. He was in a wheel chair and when he came to my bed his first words were, ‘You’ve had a haircut, Flanagan’. I replied, ‘Yes, Sir, but not voluntarily, and at least I was facing the enemy’. I said this because the Skipper had been wounded at the back of his thigh. He said, ‘Cheeky young .....’ He was genuinely sorry that we had been hurt. It was good to have him visit us, he really boosted morale. It was the last time I was to see him for a long time.

“On another occasion there was sounds like the excited voices of children coming out of school at home time. We were wondering what the hell was happening only to find the crew of REPOSE rushing around the wards shouting the names of individuals. I heard shouts of, ‘Where’s Flanagan!’ then some of the orderlies from REPOSE found me. It was as though I was a long lost relative; they made such a fuss of me. They brought a couple of bottles of rum, with which we had a party for a couple of nights, destroying the good work of the antibiotics. I thought this was wonderful of the crew of REPOSE; it was enough to have had them transport us from Shanghai to Hong Kong but this was a little bit special and helped morale enormously.

“17th June I was considered well enough for the journey home. I could not leave RN Hospital, Hong Kong without thanking the medical staff for their assistance in helping me adapt to my new life, the nurses and orderlies were absolutely brilliant. One young lady in particular who helped me through this difficult period was Val Parsons; she above all took my mind off my wounds and pain by her presence. She was my nurse and needless to say, I fell madly in love with her. We were transported to the

quayside and taken aboard HMT LANCASHIRE, very fitting for a lad from the county of the same name.

“I remember the journey home in the bowels of the LANCASHIRE, and if it had not been for the CONSORTs, mostly walking wounded, it would have been a most miserable journey home. But they made this journey a very special one that brought me back to sanity after being wounded – by the time I got home I was ready to face anything that came along; they brought the smile back on my face and brought back the Flanagan in me.” And there was also something else which must have lifted Tom Flanagan’s spirit and shown him that like himself, his old ship was far from finished. “LANCASHIRE was en-route to the U.K. with the wounded from the Yangtze on board; HMS CONSORT was en-route to Singapore for a massive refit with all spares and manpower being brought out from the U.K. to do the job. Their paths were to cross on this journey. When she spotted LANCASHIRE, CONSORT caught up with her and did a couple of laps of honour around LANCASHIRE, sounding sirens before continuing her journey on a regular turn of speed.”

The extent of the ship’s casualties were again highlighted some years later by Dr Gren Wederburn who joined the HMS CONSORT Association in 1996. Dr Wederburn was one of the senior surgeons in Shanghai at the time of the Incident. Tom Flanagan, himself one of the more serious casualties to survive remembered the doctor telling the Association members that he; the doctor had treated 81 crew for wounds in Shanghai following the action. Added to the 10 dead this would have meant 91 out of a total of 160 of CONSORT’s complement had been incapacitated in varying degrees.

Daily routine quickly returned to the ship and there were even a few pleasant surprises, at least for William Robson. “Where we had been, no mail had been able to reach us for about six weeks. It also took about that time to come from



England. Air mail hardly existed. Many bags of mail suddenly appeared on board and most of them seemed to be landing in my tiny Ship's Office. I was the Correspondence Officer. It was nice to get a letter from one's girlfriend or mother. I don't think many of us had wives. I, however, had an administrative morass which was going to take days to get through.

"The official mail did, however, contain confirmation of my promotion to Lieutenant with an effective date of the previous October – some six months earlier! It was therefore possible to acquire seniority by solid service and agility in exams. Thus, on the day of the battle although only wearing the single stripes of a Sub-Lieutenant I had in fact been *Lieutenant Robson*."

Art Pearse's time in CONSORT was now coming to an end and he would soon be returning home. For others though there would be no such opportunity. In a diary entry dated 24 June he noted: "Leading Seaman Harvey died at 10 p.m. last night. Buried this afternoon." When Art Pearse's replacement arrived, "I left CONSORT on 2 November to await passage at HMS TERROR in Singapore. I took passage on ORDUNA, arriving Liverpool on 6 December, 1949. I was married on 17 December, but my new brother-in-law, Shipwright Harold Hooper could not attend as he had been drafted to HMS CONSORT! He was on his way out as I was coming home, so our troopships must have passed somewhere."

Ron Howell too was going home. "My relief was waiting in HMS TAMAR and within a few days I was boarding the troopship and on my way home. By a quirk of fate, at the outbreak of the Korean War in the following year, I was drafted to HMS AMETHYST which was returning to the Far East after an extensive refit."

William Robson was disappointed by the turn of events following the action. "On the 24th April the Communists entered Nanking. There was no bloodshed and the Embassy

was not damaged. Some resistance was put up in Shanghai but by the 27th May it too was in Communist hands.”

On 22nd December 1949, eight months after the event, the first real acknowledgment by official sources was made of HMS CONSORT's own part in the Yangtze Incident. By that time of course the story had faded from the front pages. The full story might well have been seen as the Naval version of the *Charge of the Light Brigade* in the futility of sending large ships to effectively operate in the narrow confines of a river against a well-entrenched enemy able to pick and choose its targets at will. The odds against a successful outcome were as long and predictable as the devastating damage and casualties inflicted on AMETHYST and CONSORT on April 20th and again on LONDON and BLACK SWAN the following day. This was made even clearer by Chairman Mao Tse-tung's clear edict to all foreign shipping that his Communist army would be crossing the Yangtze on April 20/21 and that all foreign ships would be regarded as *hostile*. It took a full eight months for a 'Special Order of the Day' to be issued by the Admiralty which finally gave partial credit to all those involved in the attempt to rescue the trapped AMETHYST:

*On 20th April 1949, HMS CONSORT was ordered to proceed from Nanking to assist HMS AMETHYST, then lying partially disabled and aground in the Yangtze Kiang after being shelled by guns of the Chinese People's Liberation Army.*

*When approaching HMS AMETHYST, HMS CONSORT came under heavy fire from shore batteries and was unable to stop close to her. She therefore passed on down river, stopped and engaged the Communist batteries. HMS CONSORT then closed HMS AMETHYST, but again came under heavy and accurate fire.*

*Although gallantly handled and well fought, HMS CONSORT received such serious damage and casualties*

*that her Commanding Officer, when within half a mile of HMS AMETHYST, decided to withdraw to avoid his ship becoming completely disabled.*

*Through the entire period under fire, the bearing and conduct of all on board were in accordance with the highest traditions of the Service.*

*(signed) Patrick Brind*

*Admiral, Commander-in-Chief*

*Far East Station, 22nd December 1949*

For CONSORT's crew and in particular, the families of those who had died in the action it was at least a small consolation, even though this acknowledgement had been a long time in coming. To add even more salt to the wound, eight years later and with the full participation of the Admiralty, the movie which supposedly recreated the events, *The Yangtze Incident* made little if any mention of the part played by the other three ships in attempting to come to AMETHYST's rescue. It was to be an insult to those who had served in the three ships and one wonders what their thoughts were as they sat in the picture theatre watching the movie, a highly successful and popular movie of the time but one which only told a part of the story.

Tom Flanagan summed up the incident on the Yangtze some years later, and in many ways what he says is a simple but true reflection of that day: "We fought a two and a half hour fight in a river, against an experienced army that had been fighting since 1934; in the early years against the Nationalists, then the Japanese, so they were seasoned fighting men. The maximum range for their guns was around 1,000 yards. The word sitting duck comes to mind for us. I am sure that it was only the speed of CONSORT that kept her in the fight for so long." It should also be added, the professionalism and courage of the ship's crew.

*We know, Lord, that you ate your dinners,*

*With shipmates, who some thought were sinners.*

*Well we who served with the British Fleet,*

*Have gathered here today to eat.  
We pray you bless both food and drink,  
And absent friends of whom we think. Amen.*

## THE KOREAN WAR

During the period HMS CONSORT was in Hong Kong after the action on the Yangtze, China itself was in turmoil. Hong Kong, being a British territory and under a 99 year lease was spared from this although there were fears that the Communists who now controlled China would not recognise Hong Kong as being under British control.

Lieutenant William Robson observed the measures being taken to ensure Hong Kong's sovereignty from the Communists. "In Hong Kong not too much seemed to have changed. The Communists had arrived at the gates but had halted there and any threat seemed to have receded. In a farsighted move Britain decided to recognise Communist China. I am sure this was the right move and it has allowed Hong Kong to be all that it has become.

"There had of course been fears that the Nationalists, our former allies might send planes from Formosa to bomb Hong Kong. The Far East Fleet would not be caught in harbour. Memories of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour in 1941 were still vivid. The ships would be sent to sea and over this period of uncertainty would spread out on a picket line round Hong Kong, thus achieving dispersal and providing early warning. Accordingly, on 30th December 1949 the Fleet sailed but there was no attack and on 2nd January we returned to harbour.

"There was another way in which the exiled Chinese Nationalists were being troublesome. There was a lucrative trade to be plied between Hong Kong and Shanghai. The only problem was that the Nationalists had instituted a blockade of Shanghai. This however, did not deter some of the more enterprising elements in Hong Kong. While we might not approve, there was no doubt that if one of these ships flying the Red Ensign (the Merchant Navy pennant), got into trouble the Navy would be expected to bail it out. The flag has to follow the trade.

“So, now there was a new duty for us as it was decided that a destroyer or frigate would be stationed near the Yangtze Entrance Light Vessel to keep an eye on things. This guard ship was often threatened by a Nationalist destroyer or frigate and sometimes buzzed by their aircraft. I do not think any shots were fired in these *confrontations*, except across the bows, but our guard ships had an edgy and tedious spell of duty. Fortunately CONSORT did not have her turn at this on my time in her. My time incidentally was rapidly running out. In March my relief arrived and I was sent home. The Korean War started in June 1950 and life on the Far East Station would never be the same again.”

At the close of World War 2, Korea, formerly an occupied territory of Japan was partitioned along the latitude 38 degrees north. This latitude would divide the now Soviet Russian occupied Korea in the north from the pro-United States portion of the country in the south. But on 25th June and without warning, Communist North Korean troops crossed the 39th parallel and invaded South Korea.

Five days later the British Prime Minister, Clement Atlee, announced that such Royal Navy forces that were in the region would be delegated to the defence of South Korea as part of a United Nations force under the control of the Americans. HMS CONSORT was one of those ships.

**Boy Seaman Ian Grant** joined the ship in 1950. “We were a draft of Boy Seamen, having completed our basic training at HMS GANGES. Passage to Hong Kong to join the ship was varied: the first part was on the cruiser HMS KENYA to Colombo via Malta; then passage on the troopship HMT ORDUNA to Singapore; then aboard the destroyer HMS CHARITY for the last leg to Hong Kong. We passed through many gales on the way, so we were a pretty excited bunch when we arrived at CONSORT in the basin at Hong Kong.

“As we filed up the gangway, the first question asked was, ‘Do you play sport,’ then, ‘Where are you from?’ ‘Cardiff,’ I replied. ‘Put him down for Rugby,’ someone else said. We then fell in and had a chat with the First Lieutenant which was the usual thing: ‘You work with me and you will be okay etc.’ The Boy’s mess was in the Canteen flat, adjacent to the Coxswain’s office which was occupied by Chief Petty Officer Crummy. We got to know him fairly well, particularly if you were in a *rattle* and had to go to the Skipper for punishment.

“We all had to live in a very small space; hammocks had to be stowed away by 0730, then down to daily routine. All Boys were allocated to POS (part of ship) and I was put to work on the focsle under Petty Officer Hill. First job every day was scrub the woodwork, starboard side, while my opposite number, Ian Green worked the port side. We used to swap sides if we got fed up – a change of scenery you could say. Not long after, the Senior Chief Petty Officer who was responsible for the ship’s maintenance, painting ship, general cleanliness etc. sent for me. ‘You were a sign writer in Civy Street,’ he said. ‘Apprenticed, sir,’ I replied. ‘Don’t call me sir! You will take over from the painter in future, go and report to him, he will give you all the routine.’ So I became ship’s painter with many jobs including painting ship’s plaques (crests) and lifebuoys to painting 8s on the funnel.

So we Boy Seamen all settled down in CONSORT for our two and a half year commission. We usually tied up to No. 5 buoy when in Hong Kong and used to go ashore when we were loaded with cash, usually HK\$10 (Hong Kong dollars) which equalled about twelve shillings and six pence. This was the princely sum which we received when allowed shore leave. We had to return aboard by 2000.

“We were on a trip to Kure in Japan, berthing near the shipyards there and were all looking forward to a run ashore to buy *rabbits* (presents). We were only there a short

time when we suddenly sailed. One of the lads said to me, 'Where's Korea, Ginger?' I replied, 'I don't know, better ask the navigator.' The Captain addressed us at 1200 that day. The navigator put up a map of Korea in the Galley flat. We didn't seem to have much of a foothold around Pusan, (the North Korean Army having overrun much of the South Korean peninsula in the first few weeks).

"My action station was as communication number on 'B' gun, one of the main armament of 4.5-inch guns. My opposite, Ian Green was tray worker, loading the ammunition into the gun. We had loads of exercises on the way to rendezvous with the American fleet and became quite proficient after a bit.

**Boy Seaman Derek Polgrean** also served in CONSORT. "We were in the theatre (of operations) from the beginning and on 1st July in company with the aircraft carrier HMS TRIUMPH, the cruiser HMS BELFAST and sister-ship HMS COSSACK were patrolling between Korea and Taiwan. It had been decided that a procedure would be established whereby the east coast of Korea would be the area of operations for the United States Navy and the west coast for ships of other nations. Consequently, on 7th July CONSORT joined the Commonwealth units off the west coast. Here she began the routine of patrolling, shore bombardment and enforcing the blockade."

**Stoker Robert Davies** was another who served in the ship at this time. "My action station was the after 4.5-inch gun. Korean patrols – I remember the name Wonsan. My clearest memories though are of Sasebo (Japan) because I was put in the cells on HMS BELFAST for five days but released after two because the Korean War had begun.

"I was ashore in Sasebo buying something, I cannot recall what, and I was waiting for my 400 Yen change which I was not being given. An American patrol told me to move on but I said I was waiting for my change and they arrested me. I got five days in the cells. The Korean War



started and we were sailing. I have always been upset by this episode as I had not misbehaved in any way.”

Derek Polgrean recalled, “After a refit in Singapore we were back on station in December 1950 just in time to experience the bitter winter weather of that year. The only cold weather clothing we had was our duffel coats and grey knitted scarves which were a present from women in Hong Kong. On 20th we refuelled at sea, and, as Boy Seamen we manned the distance line from our fo’c’sle to the tanker; this had flags at intervals so that our captain, Commander Carr could see whether he was keeping a steady and parallel distance. With freezing spray coming over the bows we were holding the line two at a time for just ten minutes before having to be relieved. As the ships moved apart, one boy managed to get his hands out of his woollen gloves, which had frozen to the line, and which now appeared as two extra flags on the line.

“On Christmas Day we had a treat. The frigate HMS MORCAMBE BAY came alongside with bags of Christmas mail for line transfer. To cheer us up her captain was on her open bridge in full Father Christmas outfit.

“Our forward base in Japan was at Sasebo from where a Korean patrol lasted ten days. One day out we started defence routine which meant that half the guns were manned all the time. Those of us who were manning the guns did so four hours on, four hours off for the duration of the patrol. In addition to this we went to action stations an hour before dawn until an hour after sunrise, and again an hour before sunset until an hour afterwards as these were the most likely times of attack by enemy aircraft.

“One of the main tasks of the destroyers was to support the aircraft carriers. In turn, when they were in Korean waters, CONSORT escorted HMS TRIUMPH, HMS THESEUS, HMS GLORY and HMS OCEAN, in addition to USS BATAAN. The aircraft carriers were escorted by four destroyers. One was positioned ahead keeping an asdic

watch as we expected attack by Chinese submarines; another was positioned between the carrier and the mainland to act as *bird dog* and rescue any pilot whose plane had been shot up and couldn't make it home; still another was positioned astern of the carrier as *plane guard* for planes that couldn't land and had to ditch; and the last was to act as *air defence* in case any of our planes were followed by enemy aircraft.

The destroyers also carried out bombardment in support of our troops ashore as well as escorting cruisers and the American battleships when they were bombarding. One notable occasion for us was escorting USS MISSOURI and HMS BELFAST into Inchon on 9th February 1951 where MISSOURI carried out a bombardment with her secondary 5-inch guns. There was also another occasion when one of the American battleships carried out a 16-inch gun bombardment from out at sea when we were close inshore to observe the fall of shot. We never saw the battleship but saw the devastating result on a hill where an enemy gun emplacement was concealed in a cave. The sounds of the shells passing over us on the way to the target were not an enjoyable experience.

“For a change we did spend some patrols on the Korean east coast bombarding the main road and rail supply routes. We also had a break at the American bases in Okinawa and Yokosuka where we were generously entertained.

“The Korean winters were bitterly cold and spray coming over the bows soon froze causing ice to build up on the focsle and superstructure, this had to be chipped off each day. Besides our watch-keeping and action stations we still had to carry out the regular maintenance work on the ship. Off watch we didn't undress, just kicked off our sea boots, shrugged off our duffle coats and climbed into our hammocks for a few hours' sleep.”

**Leading Seaman George Jones** also remembered the terribly cold winters in the waters off the Korean Peninsula.

“Apart from the odd typhoon when things could get a bit hairy, the summer patrols could be borne with little hardship. But in the winter the cold was absolutely mind numbing with temperatures falling well below zero and accompanied by extremely high winds and blinding snow blizzards. During these winter patrols the first job for the seamen each and every day was to clear the unbelievably thick ice that covered the guns and superstructure.”

Even though this work was carried out each morning it made very little difference recalled Ian Grant. “We could not train or elevate the guns because they were frozen up. We had no foul weather gear and had to make do with what we had, oilskins etc. One day on our return to Sasebo, we were issued with warm clothing, leather boots, white sea-boot stockings and a duffle coat. We all thought this a bit better but we still wore our oilskins as well!

“Korea was a bunch of patrols, shortage of food, extreme cold weather and lack of sleep. Some of the boys would get a bit niggly but there were no fights at all.

“I do recall one episode when we were in Wonsan carrying out a bombardment against Communist shore guns. It was 0800 and the lookout said, ‘(HMS) COCKADE is being attacked by aircraft.’ She had come to relieve us. There was an American destroyer with us and we fired 210 shells in defence of COCKADE and at the shore batteries before we broke off the engagement. I believe COCKADE was hit in the boiler room by a bomb from the aircraft. We were ordered to escort COCKADE to Kure and we were looking forward to a run ashore but we just went into harbour, turned around and went straight back to Sasebo. Ah well, such is life.”

In September 1952, a merchant ship, S.S. TAKSHING bound for Macao came under attack from a Communist gunboat and an armed junk. CONSORT was despatched to assist the merchant ship. A newspaper clipping of the time recorded: “*The TAKSHING (Capt. J. B. McCaw) was*

*compelled to stop and an armed boarding party from the Communist boats went aboard and removed two Chinese passengers. In reply to a distress signal, the frigate HMS MOUNTS BAY and the destroyer HMS CONSORT went to the rescue.*

*“At five minutes to seven,” continued the newspaper report, “the two British ships arrived at the position given by the TAKSHING to find the steamer underway for Hong Kong. At 7.30 a.m. when the three ships were about four and a half miles inside Lantao Channel, Chinese shore batteries fired on them. The fire was returned by the British men-of-war. Sporadic firing lasted for about five minutes. No damage was done to the British ships and no one was hurt. It is thought that the Communist batteries were 75mm guns.”*

**Ordinary Signalman Wally Turner** had some interesting memories of time spent in Korea waters. “We had a South Korean named Kim on board who was to act as interpreter if we made contact with any R.O.K. (South Korean) vessels. He was attached to the V/S Department and spent most of his time on the Flag deck. He was good company and had a great sense of humour.

“We were on one patrol and the weather was a bit rough. Late during the First Watch, the Asdic Control reported a contact and the Skipper came on to the bridge. After some discussion it was decided to drop a pattern of depth charges. There was no further contact and it was concluded that it must have been a large mammal or a shoal of fish. As I came off the bridge to go below, there on deck were all the Chinese hands chattering away to each other and every one of them had his life jacket on. The rest of the ship’s company were all fast asleep and probably never heard a thing.

“Korea is known as the ‘Land of the Morning Calm’ and to see it at daybreak is quite a sight. The surface of the sea is like glass, there is not even a whisper of wind except in

the typhoon season. One morning on patrol off the Korean coast we heard from HMS COMUS who was not far ahead of us. She had been attacked by an enemy plane. It had bombed her and the bomb had hit the ship killing two. We were with her the following day when the two men were buried at sea.

“One of the most unusual incidents occurred in Inchon harbour. We were in company with HMS COSSACK and an American destroyer who was the Senior Officer. We entered the large harbour together, and after a short time we put our motor boat into the water. She was meant to go to COSSACK to collect a document. On-board the boat, apart from the usual crew, were a telegraphist and a signalman with their necessary equipment.

“Before the motor boat reached COSSACK the shore batteries opened fire on the boat. From the American came the signal, ‘War Dance’. This meant that they were to proceed at speed in a circle which they duly did. This left our motor boat circling around in the middle and finally with their signal lamp they asked, ‘What shall we do?’ Thankfully the shore batteries stopped, they were picked up by the ship and we went out to deep water. The comments from the boat’s crew were comical although it was a serious situation. Needless to say they were quite frightened.”

Though serving in a war zone the ship still kept to a strict and familiar daily routine and as a non-commissioned officer, **Petty Officer Denys Hanley** was one of those involved in making sure this routine was adhered to by the crew. There were of course exceptions when this routine was altered somewhat and this was, “When the ship went on patrol into what was referred to as the action zone. Everything was kept at a high state of readiness, for example the watch on deck now had two Petty Officers on each watch. One was a gunnery specialist and the other looked out for the seamanship side. Many of the patrols

started out from Sasebo and within a relatively short space of time were in position on either the East or West coast of the Korean peninsula. Most of the daylight hours were spent in routine maintenance around the ship with everything *winding up* around 1600. After that, the watch on deck took over and ran the routine.

“This watch usually consisted of about fifteen Able and Ordinary Seamen, a Leading Hand (better known as a Killick) and two Petty Officers. The Killick organised the seamen into a variety of tasks such as lookouts, lifebuoy sentry, bridge messenger and telegraphs man in the Wheelhouse, and the jobs were rotated so nobody was stuck in the same place right through the watch. It also helped to keep everyone awake. All well and good if nothing untoward happened. But if there was *Panic Stations* i.e. emergency or action stations, everybody closed up no matter what watch you had done before. If you missed a night’s sleep it was ‘hard luck sailor.’ ”

It was a tradition for warships, particularly those on foreign station and a long way from home to have a ship’s mascot and CONSORT was no exception. Denys Hanley recalled, “It was a little dog known as Scrubber. We had been on patrol a couple of weeks and had anchored close inshore. The Officer of the Day came over the broadcast system to say that anybody who wanted to stretch their legs on dry land could go ashore for a couple of hours. It was not your normal run ashore as the place, Pong Yen Do or something, had no pubs or anything else. I decided though to give it a whirl and eventually got in the second boat load to leave the ship. Unbeknown to me some of the lads had decided to take Scrubber on the first boat. After an hour or so of wandering around I headed back to the beach and caught the last boat back to the ship.

“On arriving back alongside the First Lieutenant asked me where was Scrubber. I told him I didn’t know the dog had been ashore, whereupon I received a right royal

bollicking and was told as the last Senior Rating ashore I should have known better. We had to resume patrol without the dog. Numerous signals were flashed around to the ships in the area and within a few days, who should arrive back on board, delivered by helicopter but our Scrubber. I still don't know who found him.”

During her period in Korea, CONSORT underwent regular refit. Derek Polgrean remembered that certain *modifications* were carried out during one of these refits. “The United Nations Command issued a ruling that no army unit was to stay in Korea longer than six months and that ships would return to their home ports after a similar period. For the American destroyers that meant going home to San Diego, for us it meant a return to Hong Kong from the end of each April until June for a boiler clean.

“We returned to Hong Kong and then on to Singapore in December 1951 for a full refit in drydock. At this time ‘X’ turret was replaced by ‘Squid’ anti-submarine mortars.”

A destroyer is no match for a battleship but some of CONSORT’s crew believed otherwise and Ian Grant recalled the mismatched incident. “We were due to rendezvous with the American battleship USS MISSOURI as we had picked up some mail for them in Sasebo. The Skipper said to send it over to them in the whaler. I was watch on deck and we had to supply a crew for the boat. Leading Seaman Joe Casey was Coxswain. It was about a three mile row but thank goodness it was good weather. We pulled the mail out to them and a voice called out to us, ‘Look out! Here comes Nelson’s Navy.’ One of our lads called back, ‘and he’s brought your ..... mail!’ We went alongside and dropped off their mail. Joe Casey told us, ‘show them you can pull a sea boat’ – and we did!

**Leading Electrical Mechanic Tony Lynch** joined CONSORT as the result of an error made by the drafting office. “My first overseas draft was to the much dreaded Persian Gulf in HMS FLAMINGO. Whereas the normal

foreign draft in those days was for two years and six months, it was reduced to eighteen months for the Gulf because of the average 120 degree temperature and the deep depression brought on by the constant patrols along the most God forsaken coastline on earth.

“I had done fifteen months of my eighteen month stint when it was announced that the ship would be returning to the U.K. Before I had finished cheering I was told that I would be going in the opposite direction, clutching a draft chit that read, ‘HMS CONSORT, Far East Fleet.’ In a very short time I found myself working in temperatures of minus 20 when only a month earlier it had been 130 degrees in the shade! I often wondered why they didn’t send me home from the Gulf with the FLAMINGO and only discovered the reason a few years ago. On obtaining a copy of my service history, it was clear that the drafting officer had dropped a clanger in assessing my time in the Gulf as just three months instead of the one year and three months I had served. I hold no grudge as I would never have joined CONSORT, a far happier ship than FLAMINGO had ever been.”

Sometime in 1952, Commander Yonge replaced Commander Carr as the ship’s commanding officer.

**Ordinary Seaman Graham Hall** joined the ship shortly before the end of the Korean War. “There was not much sleep to be had aboard ship, what with exercises, dawn action stations, two watches, and firing one star shell every hour throughout the night.”

When one is near to death and suffering, religion and thoughts of God can play on the mind, even for those who are not believers and a prayer here and there is sometimes whispered. Derek Polgrean recalled that, “Church services were not held aboard destroyers at sea as they probably were on larger ships such as cruisers and aircraft carriers, where *Divisions* would have been a part of the usual daily routine. I do remember though that on at least one occasion



when we were returning to Hong Kong from Korean waters the Captain led prayers of thanksgiving.”

One of those who joined the ship shortly after the Korean War had ended was **Coder (E) Colin Bond**, a National Serviceman. The National Servicemen were called up by ballot to help fill the required numbers in an expanded military brought on by the war. “My medical papers arrived telling me to report to Sandyford Road, Newcastle-on-Tyne for my medical. I duly reported and passed A1, then came the question, ‘Which service do you want to join?’ I said, ‘Royal Navy,’ to which the immediate reply was, ‘Not many National Servicemen get into the Navy.’

“In October 1952, my call up papers arrived and to my great relief I was ordered to report to Victoria Barracks, Portsmouth on November 2nd. I remember that the barrack room was freezing and my first R.N. meal was fish, chips and peas. The fish batter exploded when it was cut, the chips were like firewood, the mushy peas had solidified, and the tea was like engine oil. The only redeeming feature was the bread, whole trays of it. I was cold, hungry, lonely and miserable that first night and I thought that surely the next two years were going to be better.

“Next morning the class fell in and we were introduced to our class leader, Petty Officer Smith, and then marched to the Sick Bay for a medical before being issued with kit. When it came to my turn I was asked what size boots I took. I replied, ‘Size 7,’ and was told that they only had size 9 and I could wear two pairs of socks. This was followed by the visit to the barber where we were asked how we wanted our hair cut and then all received the *Basin Cut*.

“The following day we were introduced to Lieutenant Commander Goldsmith who proceeded to inform us that anyone using bad language would be marched off to Sick Bay and administered with a large dose of castor oil. When

this introductory talk had ended we were then marched to the Parade Ground where we met our Chief Instructor. He wasn't very tall, had wizened, weather-beaten features and proceeded to curse and swear, using some words I had never even heard, to tell us what miserable sods we were. At the end of six weeks square bashing we moved to the signal school at St. Budeaux to learn about coding messages.

“After the course was completed and we had all passed, we were split into Port Divisions and asked if we preferred Home Ship, Home Shore, Foreign Ship, Foreign Shore. I was lucky to get Devonport Division and asked for a Foreign Ship. Going through joining routine I had to do the swimming test in a canvas suit, but on the second length I found myself swimming at an angle down to the bottom of the pool before being unceremoniously fished out on a pole. I never did pass the swimming test.

“Finally we were allocated our postings. Mine was HMS CONSORT via HMT ASTURIAS. I was made welcome aboard ship and started getting to know my mess mates. Hong Kong looked very interesting with hordes of junks sailing about in the harbour.

“I met with the Education Officer, Lieutenant Brock and was told about my various jobs. There seemed to be a mountain of amendments to be inserted into Queen's Regulations and Admiralty Instructions – almost as though they had been saving them for me. Life seemed to be a mixture of coding amendments, E.T.I. (Educational Training Instruction), a book muster, cook of the mess, out to sea on exercises, watching films at night on the quarterdeck (weather permitting), dhobying and ironing.

“Shortly after joining CONSORT we sailed for Singapore for a full refit where the ship's company was billeted in the shore base, HMS TERROR. After a couple of weeks a batch of us were each issued with a rifle and a clip of bullets and were told that we were going on R&R

(rest and recreation) to Penang Island. This required an overland train journey through the Malayan jungle with the trains being a favoured target of the bandits (Malayan Liberation Army). Thankfully the journey was incident free apart from anxiety felt during the hours of travelling between Singapore and Penang.”

Life aboard the destroyer could be just as dangerous as shells from a North Korean shore battery and Graham Hall experienced one of these dangers which nearly cost him and Willie Leitch their lives. “CONSORT slipped and proceeded down Hong Kong harbour to refuel prior to sailing for a two week Formosa (Taiwan) patrol. On completion of taking on fuel, Willie and myself prepared to jump buoy and secure the ship to No. 3 buoy to await sailing orders for our patrol. As the ship was making its approach to the buoy, we set off in the motor boat and jumped on to the buoy with the picking up rope.

“I was experienced at buoy jumping whereas it was Willie’s first time. Having secured the picking up rope to the buoy we got back in the boat. Turns were then taken around the capstan on the forecastle and the ship was hauled up to the buoy. With the cable perfectly hanging up and down to the buoy from the bullring, we once again jumped back on the buoy. As the shackle securing the cable was fixed in place, for some unexplained reason the ship started to move slowly ahead while we were still busy on the buoy. All hell then broke loose. The buoy suddenly went up on end, and with a split second decision I shouted to Willie, ‘Jump!’, otherwise Willie and I would have been crushed between ship and buoy. We found ourselves swimming in Hong Kong’s *perfumed* (it was anything but that) harbour, witnessing the whole bow of the ship being twisted around with the bullring and the jack staff almost touching the water. That was an experience I will never forget. Willie and I suddenly went from being just ordinary members of the crew to heroes, as through our supreme

teamwork we put CONSORT alongside in Hong Kong to carry out repairs instead of a Formosa patrol.”

On another occasion Denys Hanley remembered problems the ship had with its large and heavy anchors. “Destroyers like CONSORT carry two anchors. When you leave harbour you do a job known as *Secure for Sea*. Part of the job is to secure the anchor to the cable. From the ring of the anchor the cable goes up to and around the cable holder and then back down the pipe that feeds the cable down into the cable locker. Also helping to draw the anchor tight up into the hawespipe is a piece of equipment known as a Blake Bottlescrew Slip and yet another item known as a Blake Slip which is used when slipping the anchor. To prevent it moving all over the place, there are two wire strops, one attached to each cable with a block and tackle hauling both cables together as tight as possible. On the night in question both wire strops had parted and the cables were banging all over the deck.

“Once we had established what the problem was, the solution was quite straightforward although made dangerous by the slippery and icy (it was winter) conditions on the forward deck. It was decided that we would fit stronger wire strops and a heavier block and tackle. Once we had all the gear in place behind ‘A’ turret, we would give two flashes of a torch to the Officer of the Watch on the bridge and he would then order the ship’s speed to be eased while the new equipment was fitted. A few more of the lads from the watch on deck helped us to get everything ready. We flashed the bridge and in next to no time at all we were fitting the new gear. The whole operation probably took no more than an hour but we seemed to be working for an eternity, probably because of the freezing cold conditions we were working under, although I bet some of the lads on the Russian convoys (in World War 2) have known it to be a lot colder.”

In May 1953, the Korean War came to an end through

the signing of an uneasy armistice. During her time in Korean waters from June 1950 through to May 1953 CONSORT had steamed 113,000 miles on active service. On a few of these miles, George Jones remembered, “We took some American Marines up the Yalu River. The Marines landed by small boats, nothing more was known about them; although on the way back CONSORT shelled a position on shore to create a diversion.”

*Gracious Lord, we know the truth,  
We've come a long way since our youth.  
From 'herrings-in' and 'figgy duff',  
To all this lovely banquet stuff.  
Forgive us if we sometimes long,  
For 'egg flied lice' with Suzie Wong! Amen.*

## MONTEBELLO

**Engine Room Artificer Derek Buck** joined CONSORT in October 1953. The ship had been on station in the Far East since her first commissioning and she was now beginning to feel her age. “We were on our way south to Hong Kong from Kure when we experienced a tropical storm of some severity, during which we lost a number of items from the upper deck including Cook Willie Leitch’s potato locker. When we arrived in Kowloon it was discovered that the paint locker in the bow was flooded because the bow plates had sprung during the storm.

“As part of the repair work, some test holes were drilled in the hull throughout its length to determine the extent of the problem. It was found that a number of areas in the plates were down to only 1/8 inch thickness. What was done about them I don’t recall.”

**Petty Officer Electrician Gwyn Thomas** was another who joined the ship in the months following the end of the Korean War. Though hostilities had finished exercises were continually carried out to keep the ship at a state of combat readiness and sometimes with comical results. “We carried out an asdic exercise with the American fleet involving CONSORT looking for an American submarine. In keeping with the way we did things, when the submarine was found a grenade was dropped off CONSORT to indicate sub found, break off and start again. We received a signal from the Flag Officer aboard the American aircraft carrier: Stop dropping grenades. Our submariners do not like it. The response from our captain, Commander Eyres cannot be written but he was very fluent in Anglo Saxon phrases. We now had to inform the submarine when found by hammering on plates in our boiler room bilges!”

Esther Williams was a famous swimmer and movie star of the 1940s. When the crew of CONSORT heard that one of the American destroyers laid claim to an Esther

Williams Trophy and Pennant it was quickly decided by one of CONSORT's crew that the pennant at least would be a good addition to the ship's own trophies. **Cook William Leitch** was himself involved in the *winning* of this pennant. "In the late afternoon, seamen from the duty watch were called to the portside of the ship as an American destroyer was coming alongside CONSORT; noticeably she was flying a pennant from her masthead depicting something that looked like a mermaid. Once alongside we learned that the pennant was known as the Esther Williams Pennant, after the famous swimmer and movie star and that there was an Esther Williams Trophy kept in the officers wardroom of the ship, both being part of a war games competition. By flying the pennant this displayed to all that the ship had secured the pennant and trophy; it was also a challenge to other ships. While explaining this, one of the Americans boasted, 'Esther Williams is the best god dammed swimmer in the world.' " Willie Leitch though would have none of this. He was sure there were far better English swimmers.

"After tea as my mates were getting ready to go ashore, I made my way to the lookout sponson on the port side of the bridge. Using binoculars, I traced the halyard lines from the Esther Williams Pennant at the top of the mast all the way to where they were secured on a cleat just above the cross-tree of the main mast which was strange as the halyard lines should have run down to the yeoman's signalling deck." (Obviously done to protect the pennant and make it more difficult to lower). "Still using the binoculars, I viewed the overall mast from top to bottom inspecting the mast ladder and access stages on it. In order to gain access to the mast of any ship, for safety precautions you have to take out the main mast electrical fuse from the circuit box located amidships thereby cutting the transmission power on the mast. Satisfied with all of that, I went down to the bosuns' wash-deck locker where I

dug out a pair of rubber gloves used when refuelling at sea. The gloves had the advantage that they prevented shocks from static electricity.

“Dressed in a boiler suit I now stood at the guard rails between the derricks of the whaler from where I had good view of the mast. Pulling on the rubber gloves and stepping across the guard rail I then sprang the distance between the two ships. Within less than fifteen minutes I was back on board CONSORT with the Esther Williams Pennant tucked safely inside my boiler suit.

“Sometime before ten that evening and after leaving the mess deck I was standing amidships chatting to Able Seaman Ray Shenstone, and it was obvious to me at least that the Yanks hadn’t noticed their pennant was gone. Inwardly I was sorely tempted to go over to the gangway between our two ships and shout, ‘Hey Yanks, Esther Williams just dived off your mast!’ I held back though. It would be more fun to let them find out for themselves that the pennant was missing.

“By a quarter to eight the next morning our mess deck was clearing with everyone making their way on deck or sitting or standing about waiting on the call for hands to muster at 0800. On board the American ship alongside the situation was similar but for the fact that there were a number of officers and ratings mulling around on the signalling deck and quarter deck. From a couple of the Yanks we learned that they were waiting to see which of the other American ships in the harbour was about to strike the Esther Williams Pennant. That’s when I let my mates know that the Yank’s were looking in the wrong direction and that the pennant, with its cut halyard lines still attached was lying between the locker we were standing beside and our ship’s funnel.

“We made a display of our discovery that was very noticeable by the Yanks, before we handed it over to Petty Officer Tug Wilson and the ship’s Buffer, John McLeod,



who along with Lieutenant Chatterson Dickson enquired of the Duty Officer on the American ship if the pennant found on our ship had come adrift from theirs. After acknowledgment the pennant was handed over much to the relief of those on board the American ship. Sometime after eleven o'clock that morning the American ship slipped from alongside of CONSORT and went to a mooring buoy out in the harbour."

There were also other *pirates* on board ship and Leading Seaman Jim Finch, (it was his second spell having served in CONSORT as a Boy Seaman/Ordinary Seaman in 1948-50), was one of these pirates. "Whilst in Singapore a group of us got together and formed the 'Consort Pirates.' There were six of us in the group all dressed as pirates, and we organised a Christmas party for underprivileged children. We collected money and gave the children a party on board ship and they all went away with presents. Just after this the ship visited Kuching in Sarawak, Borneo. The Governor of Kuching called on the Captain and during their conversation the Governor mentioned he was giving a children's party on New Years Eve – the Captain said he would send his pirates to help.

"So on that day the six of us went ashore to the Governor's mansion where the party was being held. We entertained the children for about an hour, then we were shown to the annex, another lovely building where we were waited on by coloured servants in white uniforms. We had a bath and changed from pirate gear into our uniforms, the waiters keeping us plied with drinks. We thought it right that we should sign the visitors' book, so among such great names as Mountbatten of Burma there were six names with *Pirates from CONSORT* after them."

The action fought on the Yangtze River had occurred several years before but the scars of this battle were still evident on board ship. **Able Seaman Rod Woodward** noticed, "On joining CONSORT (in 1954) in dry-dock in

Singapore, I was allocated to the after side mess deck. I remember distinctly when I pulled out my seat locker seeing a jagged shell hole which had been plated over. I thought at the time if it had been a foot or so lower, it could have hit either the shell or cordite magazine, and that would have been the end of CONSORT.”

For **Boy Seaman Alex Gray** there was never a dull moment, even on his way to join the ship. “The flight from London involved a couple of overnight stops, one of which was in Cyprus. The transfer bus had wire mesh windows and was full of bullet holes inflicted by the followers of Archbishop Makarios. The comfort level dropped even more when we spotted all the machine gun posts around the town of Nicosia.

“When we joined the ship in Singapore we were billeted in the Boys Mess which was located in the Canteen flat. I wasn’t all that confident about the securing of my hammock and during my second night aboard I woke up with my head down the hatch leading to the Stokers mess. I soon learned the safest way of securing my hammock.

“Life on board CONSORT wasn’t in the least bit boring, but it was mainly the runs ashore that one remembers most. One such run in Borneo was particularly memorable when I found myself confronted by three Dyak head-hunters with stretched ears, tattooed faces and carrying the scariest knives I’d ever seen. I was told later that they were employed by the Army in Malaya to track down the Communist insurgents. They might have been friendly souls but I didn’t stop to find out.”

Another memory for Alex Gray was Christmas, 1955. “I was the youngest aboard CONSORT and we spent Christmas Day alongside HMS NEWCASTLE, and being the youngest, I was made Captain for the day. Pity about the uniform though, because Captain MacKenzie was well over six feet tall and I was at least a foot shorter.” When not being Captain for a day, Boy Seaman Alex Gray had

other duties aboard ship.

“My action station was in the Transmitting station as Communicator. My job was to transmit information to the gun crews which provided something of a test, with me hailing from Fife and having to communicate with a Glaswegian on ‘A’ Gun, a guy from Stoke on ‘B’ Gun, and a Welshman on ‘Y’ Gun. How we got through it I will never know!”

**Coder Roy Brabiner** remembered one of the good times aboard ship. “The highlight of the evenings was watching the many ‘Tom and Jerry’ cartoons which were shown, with the resounding chorus of ‘Good Old Fred’ when the film director’s name, Fred Quimby appeared on screen.

“As with any type of ship, rough weather has to be encountered at some time or other as well as the many days of lovely calm weather when one could watch the flying fish, the dolphins escorting us, and my favourite sight, the albatross – so graceful as it stayed with us for many miles. As for the rough weather, I think all on board would agree that this was when we were going through the Formosa Straits on our way to Japan where we encountered four days of extreme weather.”

The world at large was now becoming a little more complicated and in 1956 the Cold War again cast its shadow. The British Government had been determined that Britain would become a nuclear power alongside the United States and Soviet Russia, and to the defence heads in Whitehall the uneasy situation both in Europe and on the Korean Peninsula had warranted this course of action. It was to be an exciting time for the defence personnel taking part in the atomic bomb tests along with the scientists and others involved, but few realised at the time the real dangers of exposure to radiation, even for a short period of time, and from a supposedly safe distance. The controversy of the atomic bomb tests at Montebello, a group of islands

off the north-west coast of Western Australia, and the similar tests carried out in the remote deserts of Maralinga in South Australia in the 1950s were to come back to haunt both the British and Australian governments in the decades to follow.

One of these tests had been OPERATION HURRICANE, conducted on 3rd October, 1952 in the Montebello Islands. Rear Admiral Torlesse R.N. was the Naval Commander and the ground zero target was the frigate, HMS PLYM.

Another round of tests was now being conducted in the Montebello Islands on the 16th May, 1956 and again on 19th June, 1956 under the code name OPERATION MOSAIC. HMS CONSORT was one of the ships taking part in these 1956 tests. **Signalman Lionel Watts** was serving in the ship at the time.

“We were based at the shore base, HMAS LEEUWIN in Fremantle and made several runs to Montebello in preparation for the tests, on some occasions taking out the scientists as well as carrying equipment and supplies. The island where the bomb was to be exploded (Trimouville Island) was just a flat greyish rock with no sign of trees or shrubs. In the distance we could see the tower made of metal lattice where the bomb would be positioned.

“Also taking part in these tests were other R.N. ships including HMS CONCORD, COSSACK, COCKADE, DIANA and some BAY class frigates. The plan was to sail out some distance from the islands and the squadron of ships would place themselves in line abreast at one mile intervals, facing towards the island.

“The further you were from the island the luckier you were, and we were the furthest. CONSORT was rigged with decontamination hoses and decontamination crews were appointed, special suits being worn, and they had to hose and scrub the decks with seawater. Supposedly this was to clear away any radioactive dust which may fall on

us.

“At about 3.00 p.m. we mustered on the upper deck to witness the explosion, and after the flash we were allowed to turn and see the mushroom cloud. After this we had to go below deck while CONSORT began her run in towards the island with the other ships. The decontamination crew then began their work after we had sailed through the fall out area and when this was completed, the people confined below deck were allowed back up.”

One of the tasks carried out during the atomic bomb tests was described in detail in the ship's magazine, *The Cruel C* (which covered the 1955-57 commission), under the heading BALLOON TRACKING: “This was done for the benefit of the scientists. The idea being that from our reports they could tell the weather in the upper atmosphere, which in turn provided them with a safety factor in making the bang. The balloon team consisted of Lieutenant Turner, Sub-Lieutenant Marriott and Able Seaman Faulkner. They surrounded the balloon at 1145 and 2345 daily and after a very delicate operation with hydrogen bottles and little weights got it nicely inflated ready for release. This occurred at noon and midnight. Then the very specialised tracking team got cracking, Captain on the bridge, Jan Searle and Co., in the director, Red Ryder and team in the Transmission station, the brains under the Navigator in the plot and, of course, the key men in the Engine Room. After about forty minutes of highly confidential mumbo jumbo during which time the ship was steaming flat out on one boiler, the balloon was tracked to a height of 60,000 feet or so and they knew all about the course and speed of the wind. That apparently was what we were there for. We then plodded back to the patrol area to mark time for another twelve hours.”

**Boy Telegraphist Graham May** recalled a *near accident* with the highly volatile hydrogen bottles used for the balloons. “The hydrogen bottles were placed in a

specially built rack close to the guard rails on the starboard side of 'Y' gun so they could easily be jettisoned overboard should a mishap occur. Commander R. R. B. Mackenzie MBE. MVO. RN. liked to carry a Scottish Piper on board and so we had become used to hearing the pipes coming from atop 'B' gun when entering harbour. On this particular evening a good number of us were down on the quarter deck listening to said piper whilst we were refuelling at sea, from what I think was one of the smaller EDDY class tankers.

"On completion, the hoses were pulled back and we moved to go our separate ways. As this was taking place, the tanker's stern suddenly swung over towards us. Her huge rubbing strake came inboard and down on the bottles. At this, I think everyone stopped breathing, apart from the piper who was on the port side of 'Y' gun. Amazingly, the bottles stayed intact and remained in the rack. The tanker, blissfully ignorant, pulled away.

"CONSORT was clear of the Montebello area for the purpose of the first test, being invited back to the islands later, to anchor off Alpha Island. A banyan was organised and those of us not on duty went ashore for a few Aussie beers and a swim. The construction of the tower for the second detonation was well under way and was close by the beach. The heads (toilets) ashore were pretty basic – a pit spanned by two planks on which was placed a hoop back chair with no bottom to the seat. I suppose there is logic in not building *brick* ones, if they are destined to be blown to kingdom come in a matter of a few days. Peering over the edge, I remember a sad looking lizard peering back at me. One can only imagine how he felt. However, unknown to him, his days of misery were soon to be over. Our only instructions whilst CONSORT was anchored off, was, 'Don't eat the fish.'

"A few days later, after one more picket, we were back alongside the south jetty in Fremantle. On 17th July,

CONSORT was open to visitors and two days later the second detonation took place. I was seventeen at the time.

“Nine years passed and I was now a Leading Radio Operator on HMS AJAX based in Singapore. It was found that I had a shadow on my lung. Although not testing positive, I was diagnosed as having contracted TB. Being discharged ‘Medically Unfit’ I had two years chemotherapy to get through. Later, aged fifty five I developed prostate cancer requiring radical radio therapy. One can only wonder...? I suppose you could say I had been very unlucky but at the same time I have been very lucky too! Not the least was to have had CONSORT as my first ship....”

**Telegraphist John Urmston** had two *fishy* stories to tell following the atomic bomb tests. “On passage from Montebello to Singapore on a warm, sticky night, I was sleeping under a bench on the focsle. During the night I awoke with a start, cracking my head on the underside of the bench to find myself grappling with a monster from the deep that turned out to be a flying fish! I managed to throw the timorous beastie overboard but not before it had covered my chest with scratches. I must have been the only bloke aboard CONSORT to have ever been attacked and wounded by a flying fish?

“On arriving at Christmas Island, I was fishing with my makeshift rod, catching various fish which I duly gave to the Chinese steward, feeling very pleased with my catch. When I went on watch, one of the first signals I received was a top priority warning that *under no circumstances were fish caught in waters around Christmas Island to be eaten due to the danger of radiation poisoning....* A desperate dash below was rewarded when I thankfully found the steward before he had consigned the fish to the cooking pot!”

*Lord, who calmed the wind and sea,  
There have indeed been times when we  
would claim that as our favourite sign,*

*(Next to turning water into wine).  
But as for us those storms are past,  
We ask your grace on our repast. Amen.*



## CONSORT EARNS HER NAME

The word *consort* is partly defined in the dictionary as a companion to a king or queen. It was during the Olympic Cruise in the second half of 1956 that HMS CONSORT truly earned her name when she acted as guard ship for the royal yacht BRITANNIA, carrying Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II and His Royal Highness, Prince Phillip, the Duke of Edinburgh who were attending the Olympic Games being held in Melbourne.

**Leading Writer Howard 'Tug' Wilson** who joined the ship the previous year (not the same Tug Wilson who had served in the ship during the Malayan Emergency and Korea), was on board CONSORT for the Olympic Cruise. "As a Leading Writer, the only writer on board, my duties were many and various and much to do with administration and not a little to do with welfare, crime and punishment either. My duties seemed to be endless, particularly as I was on my own, with no one I could off-load either problems or jobs to.

"On entering harbour and whilst everyone else in the ship would be up for immediate runs ashore, scribes would be required to sort through all official mail, streaming it out to Divisional Officers, Departmental Officers etc. and attempt to meet the last outgoing mail before sailing, most often after a very short stay. So the opportunities for time ashore were pretty few and far between and my runs happened when most were returning aboard.

"Among my nicer jobs when receiving mail was getting bags containing new and unissued library books and magazines. We also used to get *comforts* put together by old ladies in the U.K. and Australia. Things like sewing kits, gloves, writing paper or buttons, a leftover from the war I suppose but sweet. At infrequent occasions we would get an allocation of seized contraband cigarettes from H.M. Customs. I saw those as they passed me via the Coxswain

and the Gunnery Officer who I understand distributed them fairly.”

The ship prepared a booklet, *The Cruel C* celebrating this 1955 – 57 commission. Lieutenant Commander Andrew Miller, CONSORT’s First Lieutenant gathered, collated and edited much of the information in the booklet which detailed every aspect of the voyage. Coder Roy Brabiner was also involved. “We turned out a ship’s Commission Booklet with which I was partly involved and in which an appropriate observation was made by the communications section, which read: We believe that there is a Coder on board – Somewhere!!!” The booklet detailed the Olympic cruise, the time spent in Melbourne, and the subsequent cruise around the South Pacific which followed: “Hooray or hurrah? Which? For what anyway? Three reasons! We’ll be home in six months! We’re going to Australia, and more importantly, we’re going to meet and escort the Royal Yacht with H.R.H. the Duke of Edinburgh embarked, for whom we shall be manning and cheering ship. The latter causes the controversy. How do we cheer?

“But then, there were times when it seemed impossible that we could be lucky enough to achieve the latter two ambitions and even getting home might be affected. First Nasser! We were first reserve to go to the Red Sea; it is amazing the effect that two hundred pairs of crossed fingers can produce. Then the Communist hooligans in Singapore began the riots; we were lucky to be spared with just one dent in a tin hat. These riots unavoidably caused the programme for the Duke of Edinburgh’s visit to Singapore to be cancelled, and his tour of the Federation of Malaya to be altered. This in turn affected our programme because now we had to meet BRITANNIA north of Sumatra. So, after the frantic last minute rush embarking stores, notably beer, we sailed with HMS CHEVIOT and HMS COCKADE one and a half days early on October 29th. After meeting BRITANNIA we escorted His Royal

Higness to Bass Harbour, Penang and Port Swettenham. On November 5th, the night we left Port Swettenham, we had an opportunity for a last run ashore with CHEVIOT's crew before they paid off. Judging by the high spirits of both ships' companies when leaving at 2300 that night, a good time must have been had by all. Off Singapore while proceeding south towards New Guinea, (HMS) NEWCASTLE joined the escort, and two days later CHEVIOT, flying her paying-off pennant parted company, proceeding to Borneo, Singapore and then home. An especial exchange of compliments passed between our two ships before she left, Captain (D) bringing her close alongside in order to do so. A deck hockey challenge offered to BRITANNIA was accepted and after dog-watch evolutions the team was taken on board BRITANNIA in one of her sea boats. Fitness and experience told, and the team were beaten 3 – 1 by the Duke of Edinburgh's team before returning by jackstay.

“The escort manned and cheered ship prior to parting company with the Royal Yacht off New Guinea. Two days' exercises and fuelling helped to pass the time before we sighted the north-eastern tip of Australia and entered the Great Barrier Reef passage, arriving at Townsville on November 12th. Townsville, a town of some 40,000 inhabitants is one of the growing ports in Queensland. A dance was arranged and some sporting fixtures held. The cricket team could not hold their own with the local Royal Australian Air Force who were almost minor English county standard. The water polo team, however, acquitted themselves honourably against a local team. The match was played in the Olympic Baths where the Australian Olympic Swimming team trained. Another thing that made Townsville enjoyable was that it was the first run ashore for a fortnight and even if the bars were of the Western swinging door type, they were open from 1000 to any time after 2200.

“Then on to Sydney for the weekend. This was not really long enough for us to enjoy the fleshpots of this little New York. Perhaps just as well; it might have been tempting to find out if the notorious Kings Cross was as tame as it looked. Anyway, we all managed to get photographs of ‘Our Bridge’ and ‘Our Harbour’, and very magnificent they are too.

“Some of us had almost forgotten what rough weather was like, not having tasted any for six months. Leaving Sydney in tropical rig at 0930, by 1600 we were glad to get into blues, and the ship was endeavouring to stand on her head. We had forty eight hours of this before arriving at our goal, Melbourne, on November 22nd.

“Melbourne, from seaward, is not at all impressive, and the filth of the River Yarra in the industrial parts has to be seen to be believed. But suddenly, you pass under a low bridge, and there in front of you is the city of Melbourne, about which everybody talks. Its parks, gardens, famous buildings and above all, its completely symmetrical layout and beautiful tree lined streets. Now it was looking at its best, with additional man made decorations lending sometimes a tone of fantasy, sometimes gaiety and sometimes beauty. The big department stores in Burke Street, with enormous designs covering their facade, and the enormous rubber inflated kangaroo advertisement floating drunkenly above the river. After a lot of recent rain, the gardens were perfect, and, as if by divine design, the weather, clearing the day before the games commenced, remained perfect throughout the whole fortnight.

“The Games can only have been enjoyed by everybody, whether they watched television on board or ashore, or visited one of the many stadia. The organization, whether it was weight-lifting or yachting, cycling or jumping, fencing or sprinting was perfect. One could not write an article about the Melbourne Olympic Games without mention of the opening ceremony. Whether viewed on television or

witnessed in the truly glorious main stadium, it was impossible for one's emotions to remain unaffected. A brilliant display of colour, coupled with touching scenes as athletes of various countries marched around the arena, will remain a lifelong memory. The Hungarians, whose countrymen were involved in a bitter conflict with their Soviet rulers, and the Israel team, whose country was struggling with Nasser's tyrannical mob, received special cheers. Then the climax; a youth aged nineteen entered the stadium; bearing on high the Olympic Torch whose flame had travelled unquenched from the original Olympus in Greece. One could continue describing thrill after thrill in the events in the Games, but let it suffice to say that one will be unlikely to witness such wonderful entertainment again.

“Besides the Games, there were many and varied attractions in Melbourne. Some of us managed to reach the countryside, others roamed nearer at home. After eight days there we left for Hobart, the capital of Tasmania. Once again we were reminded that it blows ‘down under’, experiencing a most unpleasant crossing of the Bass Strait until we were in the lee of Tasmania. Once there all was well, and accompanied by H.M. Submarine TELEMACHUS we arrived in Hobart on December 1st. Our four day stay there was voted by many to be the best to date; in fact even now some will vote it the best, even after New Zealand and the South Sea Islands.

“Our visit coincided with the Tasmanian Parliamentary Centenary, which demanded a guard (from the ship) fifty strong, to march through the streets. This they did, with noted success. We were honoured during our stay by visits from the Governor, Sir Ronald Cross and Lady Cross. Also two visiting British politicians, Lord Lansdowne and Mr Emmanuel Shinwell, both of whom visited the mess decks. There, one, who shall be nameless, informed Mr Shinwell that he didn't like him because he was a Conservative!

“After brewery runs, children’s parties and other gay festivities the visit ended on December 4th. Despite the hour of sailing, 2300, the jetty was crowded with people to see us off. Judging by the numbers to see the Captain next day, some of us would rather have been waving from the shore.

“Back to Melbourne, the trip back being very much better than going, we caught up the final week-end of the Games, the closing ceremony was again impressive but not on the scale of the opening. Twice now we have visited Australia and enjoyed all that this great continent can offer; in fact we consider that we know the place well. So let us finish by congratulating them on their very brilliant presentation of the XVI Olympiad, and thank them for many wonderful runs ashore.

“Well, after the fun, the work. Our preparation for the annual inspection had been going on steadily and on Friday, December 7th, we had the departmental inspection. Divisional Officers could be seen doing a lot of fast talking to Senior Officers of HMS NEWCASTLE. They looked as if they didn’t believe a word of it, but were too olympically minded to worry. Next day, Captain (D)’s Divisions and inspection was carried out by Captain Kennedy of NEWCASTLE and then a farewell run ashore in Melbourne, ready to sail for the sea inspection and New Zealand. By now it seemed that life just consisted of hail and farewell, but the morale of all was never higher and it was becoming apparent that Consorts were past masters of the art of meeting people, squeezing people and leaving them happy. Who said broke and contented? The sea inspection followed the usual pattern. They killed most of us and played hell with the remainder. We got through it though, and after parting company with NEWCASTLE rolled our way to New Zealand.

“Our first call was at Milford Sound in the New Zealand Alps, and we spent just one day there admiring the scenery

and looking at the snow. A boat came alongside and passed over much crayfish and fresh fish, thereby proving that everything cometh to he that asketh nothing. While at Milford, a group of volunteers headed by Lieutenant Banham and Sub-Lieutenant Suther, left the ship to walk or hitch-hike to Nelson, a distance of several hundred miles. They got there too! A.B.'s Jackson and Edison being first home while the Wardroom contingent brought up the rear guard.

“We arrived at Nelson, which has been described as Sleepy Hollow, on December 15th. None of us would agree with the above defamation. The local gendarmes ceased to apply the licensing laws, the population came out of hibernation and the Maoris put on a Barbecue and Haka on first night in. To enliven things still further the local cinema had *Rock Around the Clock* showing. It is believed that the Stokers mess deck took up a block booking for the whole run. There were numerous trips laid out for the ship's company and a small local populace spared no effort to make our stay pleasurable. Definitely a gate record on the jetty when we left, well to the fore being a Maori girl who nearly became Mrs Marconi. On leaving Nelson we called at Wellington for oil, it was here that Sippers broke ship.

“Sippers was the epitome of a ship's cat; they don't come any better. The date of his entry into the service is not known. One story maintains that he was smuggled into the ship by some lads when they went for a run in Kure last commission. Another is that he was brought aboard as a relief for an earlier cat, Gulpers. Whatever the truth may be, Sippers, as far as we were concerned in this commission, had always been here and as far as we could see, always would be.

“Sippers would take his runs ashore as seriously as anyone else in the ship. He was seldom seen without a girlfriend in a new port and was never adrift, his leave ending when the siren was tested just before the ship left

harbour. At sea, he was a great angler. His specialty being flying fish; and he had great fun and battles with them.

“One day the buzz that the ship was returning to U.K. was confirmed and I have a feeling that the story reached the ears of our feline member, so that by the time we had arrived at Wellington, he had already decided to become a new Kiwi. Anyhow, we sailed from Wellington at 2300 that night and Sippers was not with us. This was not discovered until next morning when a frantic search was made for him. He was not to be found and signals to Wellington proved to be unavailing. Was Sippers a deserter? It’s hard to say because the night we left Wellington the siren was not tested.” (As a postscript a photo was included in *The Cruel C* of Sippers in happier days with ship’s crest as backdrop, looking at the camera and seated contentedly beside a bottle of beer).

Tug Wilson remembered CONSORT’s voyage across the Pacific where she was to transit the Panama Canal and then on to the U.K. “We called at Villa in the New Hebrides. It was something out Joseph Conrad’s book, LORD JIM with its sandy beaches, long outrigger canoes, surf, grass skirts and spears. We visited the residence of the Archbishop of Melanesia, an affable old buffer. He had a housekeeper who served us tea and biscuits, dear old soul. In the harbour lay a smallish white yacht and on board a character not unlike the chap in the movie, THE AFRICAN QUEEN. He was a very faithful servant to and for the Archbishop who was the local missionary, local being that he covered all the islands in the group. It hadn’t been too many years before that all the inhabitants had been cannibals. We had a feast laid on for us and all the people trekked from all over the island in their best gear to sing and dance for us. We left very reluctantly, feeling like the BOUNTY crew must have felt.

“Our next port of call was Suva, Fiji. An outstanding memory was the police uniform – skirt and top, but you



wouldn't mess with them. Robert Louis Stevenson is buried in Apia in the Samoan Islands and usually visitors make a trek to his grave. I cannot remember if a party was sent to maintain or tidy it up. Warships from three Navies: Britain, Germany and the United States were all anchored in Apia before a terrible storm in the 1880s. I was given to understand that only the British (HMS CALLIOPE) escaped unscathed while the rest sank.

“In Panama City whilst transiting the Panama Canal on January 27th, I found myself locked up in the U.S. Military Police H.Q. cells all night. I only remember admiring the flashing blue light on top of the white police car, (not known in Britain until forty odd years later). I also remember upsetting the duty chief at the charge desk by stepping over the brass strip; this ensured me a night's accommodation.

“We arrived in Bermuda on February 8th and berthed in the Naval Dockyard. At that time of year Bermuda invited masses of young American students to spend a free fortnight believing it was good for future tourism. This played to our advantage as there were plenty of happy, good looking young girls. Before departing Bermuda, we had a pleasant ‘End of Commission’ smoker in the dockyard canteen. The Ship's Band was a skiffle group ably led by Leading Seaman George Ritchie, together with combs and washboard – very popular at that time.

Two memories of Ponte Del Gada (Portuguese Azores): The first was the *Esplanade* which was patterned in black and white geometric patterns, something not seen in the U.K. during this period. Secondly, whilst we were there an annual religious festival was taking place. This entailed the women of the town crawling all the way from the jetty to the cathedral, praying all the while. This ceremony was in remembrance of lost fishermen and a penance for the coming year. With cobbled streets it must have been very painful work.

“We were soon sailing off into home waters and it was becoming rough and cold; long and very warm watch coats were now the order of the day.”

Some of those aboard ship during the Olympic Cruise had found the temptation far too great. There had been a small number of desertions as the ship moved around the Australian coast, dropping into ports along the way. One of these desertions was from **Leading Seaman Dennis Cunliffe**'s mess. “We were visiting Townsville in Queensland and had been on a trip to a sugar plantation. We all got to sample their home made brew, after which we spent the rest of the afternoon in a pub. When we got back to the ship we were three bodies short. One of them was in our mess, I think he was a South African and anyway, they were still adrift when we sailed. We did some exercises with the Royal Australian Navy and then went back to either Sydney or Melbourne. Whichever it was they were there on the jetty waiting for us. It turned out that they had taken jobs on the plantation but it was worse than being on a Royal Navy ship! They had to work from early morning until very late in the day with only short breaks. After a few days they decided it was easier in the Navy and so gave themselves up. I don't know what happened to them after that.”

CONSORT had transited more than half the globe, and **Leading Telegraphist Kenneth Clee** whose special duties in CONSORT at the time were in the Wireless office recalled that though New Zealand was his favourite country visited, for his most favourite run ashore there was no beating the Olympic Games. For Ordinary Seaman Alex Gray (having been promoted from Boy Seaman during the cruise), Melbourne too was his best run ashore because, “the girls there were gorgeous, but that's another story.”

*Lord, there are prayers we shouldn't ask,  
As we sit down for dinner.  
Like 'When they draw the Pusser's Rum,*

*May my ticket be the winner!  
But we ask your blessing on our meal  
And our Association,  
For those who couldn't come today,  
And on our British Nation. Amen.*

## FINAL DAYS

Leading Writer Tug Wilson recalled CONSORT's arrival home, a home the ship had not seen for nearly ten years. "Plymouth could be seen from our breakwater anchorage and soon the usual flurry of small boats, visitor and tender traffic were out to greet us: water boat, urgent provisions, beer, mail, and staff officers, all at once. First light on a misty, drizzly morning all crew were fully booted as 'Close Up Special Sea Dutymen' was ordered until we came into the Hoe, and then, 'Clear Lower Deck' and the long slow but proud journey up the river, past Mount Wise, past Kings Stairs and into the dockyard, all the while escorted by a small fleet of interested spectators and some local fishermen.

"The paying off pennant caused some minor problems for it did seem exceptionally long, and I seem to remember an attempt to buoy up the end with a couple of small balloons only succeeded in losing a fair part of it in the choppy water.

"Along the jetty there was a fair sized party of family and friends, waiting patiently in the mucky drizzle even though we had arrived with some morning sunshine as evidenced in the tying up photo. Even now I can recognise most of the people in that picture with 'Subbie' now Lieutenant Waugh in the eyes of the ship. I am struck now looking at the picture how buckled all the ship's plates appear in the morning sunshine. We had come a long way to get here but weren't we clean, spick, span and smart. The rest of that day is a little lost, for most people it was hazy, for some it was 'boilermakers' with rum chasers; for all though it was a very happy and proud day even though there was no band on the jetty and no parties other than our own. We were given weekend leave immediately and then returned to de-ammunition, de-store and pump off surplus oil before going off in two leave parties for Foreign Service

Leave.

“For me it was a busy time with tons of mail in and tons of mail out. The hardest working man though would have been, from memory, the Coxswain, Chief Petty Officer Bill Slack. He must have made out a couple of hundred liberty tickets, travel warrants and baggage vouchers. He would most likely have spent nearly all of his time on the return journey, from the Azores to Guzz calculating Foreign Service Leave plus individual travelling time. He would also have had to make out the first wave of draft chits. Foreign Service Leave was three days for each month served abroad plus travelling time. On my reckoning eighteen months times three days equals fifty four days leave so Plymouth Railway Station and ‘Goodbye Navy’ with a good bundle of equivalent money. The weather that February turned out to be almost tropical. I can remember sunbathing on the dunes of North Devon and topping up my tan. And then there were the evenings with lovely long cool Tuborg or Carlsberg beer until the money started to run out. Meanwhile the ship remained afloat in the dockyard.”

CONSORT was finally decommissioned in May, 1957 and her crew were sent their separate ways, some to other ships or shore establishments while others left the Navy for good returning to civy street. Nearly four years passed until on a day in March, 1961....

A ten year old boy was out playing in the fields and watched as the ship, an old destroyer; her sides now painted with streaks of rust went by to the breakers yard. ‘I wish I could go aboard her?’ he asked his father. His father took him in the car and they got on board the ship. The boy asked if he could have the ship’s bell but was told there was no way he could have it. The man who had refused the young boy’s request though must have felt a pang of guilt. “Hang on a minute, you could have this,” and promptly offered the boy the name board with CONSORT’s name in

bold brass letters on the polished wooden board. Years later the HMS CONSORT Association was contacted by the boy, now a Master Marine Engineer, who told them the story of how the name board had come into his possession. Though the ship itself was long gone its name at least had somehow survived.

Terry Hodgins who served in the ship as a Boy Seaman often thought about his old ship. "My job as a regional manager for a large U.K. based manufacturer often took me to the Swansea area. During the late 1960s and early 70s I became intrigued by the clear view in the Dockyard direction of what was obviously the mast of a destroyer. Knowing that I was less than a ten minute drive away, I often told myself that the next time around I would investigate. The fact that I never did, troubled me, thinking that the ship I had often seen in the distance could have been CONSORT, the ship in which I had served twenty years earlier." CONSORT though had gone several years before this and the ship was another sadly consigned to the breakers yard. Terry adds, "On reflection it was best to remember CONSORT for the proud ship she had once been, rather than what she had become."

Ex-Petty Officer (now civilian) Gwyn Thomas was one though who did get to walk the decks of his old ship for one last time. "It was whilst working in Swansea and on my way to my workshop one day in March 1961 that I saw CONSORT in a dry-dock awaiting the men to cut her up. I persuaded the man on the gate to let me walk the ship's decks. One of CONSORT's name boards was later returned to the Association and was very clear to have been from CONSORT's starboard quarter aft."

And how did this name board (for the ship carried two name boards, port and starboard sides) come to be returned to the Association? Tom Flanagan says, "Some years ago the Association members were asked to HMS CAMBRIA by the Swansea Sea Scouts where there was an official

presentation of the name board by the Swansea Sea Scouts to the Association. Everyone was made most welcome and it was a lovely gesture, very much appreciated. They honoured us even more by taking the name HMS CONSORT Swansea Sea Scouts. Since then, the name board has been brought to many of our reunions and placed on display.”

*Heavenly Father, bless our dishes,  
Chips and peas and little fishes.  
Grant us, Lord, that when we die,  
There'll be reunions in the sky.  
So seamen may in heaven dwell,  
Whilst all the stokers go ..... as well. Amen.*

## OLD SHIPMATES GET TOGETHER

And what of those who had served in CONSORT? Tug Wilson who served in the ship during its final commission and who was still in the Royal Navy was to come across two of his former shipmates in different and exceptional circumstances. “It was some years later (1964) and I was making a road journey in a Mini car. On-board was my wife, daughter, son, and a goldfish along with as many household possessions as we could cram in. We were transferring from my parents’ home in Devon to a hiring which we had at last been able to get in Portsmouth. My son was fourteen months old and my daughter just coming up to four years. The journey, in mist and heavy rain was not an easy one for there were no motorways in those days. We had completed about two hours on the road and had just come up to the brow of a long hill in by now heavy traffic when the engine stopped in clouds of smoke and steam.

“There were no roadside organisations to speak of in those days, and in any case having a young family, not a lot of spare brass. What to do? I had only rudimentary knowledge of motor vehicles and did not know the extent of the damage. In the event I decided to turn the bend and use the downward hill to coast to the bottom and into a town, about a half a mile or so. Praise be, we managed it and further praise immediately on my left was a reasonable sized garage. I pulled in. It was now about 5.15 p.m. on a very murky and wintery evening and the garage was about to close. The first person to greet us from the garage greeted me with, ‘Hello Tug – what’s the problem?’ What a shock to me when I recognised one of my old CONSORT shipmates.

“Having explained the problem, he told me to take my brood and sit in the cold office. After a short while he came back and told me that I had no oil at all and that the engine



had seized up completely. I had another wave of panic for here we were stranded and some further two hours from our destination with no means of getting there: kids crying, wife very anxious as was I, and not a penny between us.

“My *angel* for such he was mustered a work crew. They must have been a racing team for within an hour and a half he had sorted the problem out. They took the engine out, stripped it right down, actually bored out the cylinders and I believe in one case relined one, put in new plugs, gaskets etc. They then reassembled the engine and put it back in the car before test driving it and handing it back to me. I explained we had no money so he suggested I go to the Post Office to draw my meagre balance, (I believe my life savings were about fifty quid then), though money was in no way a consideration. Finally, he and his mates sent us on our way, a relieved and happy family. The *angel* was formerly Leading Seaman Josie Gray. I had last seen him in the spring of 1957 when the ship came home.”

In life there are always both good and hard times and while Josie Gray had fallen on the good times there were others who were struggling. Tug Wilson was to come across one of these in 1979. “It was the year of endless and innumerable strikes. Coal, fuel, food and even grave digging were all hit. I was still living in Devon but had now finished with the Navy, having nearly completed a fifth *fiveer*. I had been in London all day and had been attending two meetings. There was no public transport to speak of and a shortage of taxis meant a long trudge from the venue to the railway station for the long journey home. In this case it was Waterloo. The garbage bin bags and rubbish were stacked six feet high and three feet deep on each side of the pavements. There I was, fully booted and in a posh suit with white shirt and tie, with the obligatory briefcase, and I guess exuding an air of comfortable opulence.

“As I entered the station entrance a really scruffy and dirty individual stood beside the wall and asked, ‘Got a fag

Guvnor?’ I gave him my nearly full packet for after all I could get more inside the station, along with a box of matches and a tenner. (I always feel that there but for the grace of God). As I was talking to him, it was a real shock that I suddenly recognised him. Since he gave no sign of knowing me I didn’t let on, after all, perhaps he didn’t want to be known. I last knew him in HMS APHRODITE, Cyprus in early 1962. Prior to that I had served with him in HMS CONSORT. It has always troubled me and yet I left him to his dignity. Who was he? He was formerly Leading Seaman ‘Judge’ Law. I remember that he sported two tattoos showing *mild* on one side of his chest and *bitter* on the other. The Captain wasn’t very pleased and made him wear a shirt at all times. A nice lad who really was his own worst enemy but very well liked.”

The HMS CONSORT story now moves forward ten years to 1989 when Terry Hodgins who had served in the ship in 1948 – 1950, “Having missed the 40th Anniversary of the Yangtze Incident held in Plymouth simply because I had heard nothing about it, I was assured that all was not lost because I could attend the AMETHYST Reunion the following year where I would be bound to meet up with dozens of ex-CONSORTs also attending. My wife Olive and I duly turned up at the Fleet Club, Devonport in the month of September 1990 to find the *total* CONSORT presence comprising former shipmates Roy Bater and his wife Yvonne, and Allan Richardson and his wife Jean. We thoroughly enjoyed their company and without them and their good ladies, my wife and I would have felt a right couple of melons. To say I felt some disappointment at not meeting up with *dozens* of old shipmates would be an understatement, but we all left for home with the hope that somewhere, sometime, SOMEONE would have a go at organising a CONSORT Reunion.

“Nearly two years later I lifted the phone to be greeted by the melodious Irish lilt of Frank (Mick) Rowley who I

had last seen in 1950 when he was bidding me a sailor's farewell from CONSORT's quarterdeck. I believe it is now called *mooning* but a rosier pair of cheeks I have yet to see.

"Mick told me that he and Bill Whitcombe had been holding mini (two man) reunions for a number of years in various London pubs and had even travelled abroad to Leicester and called on Allan Richardson who, a full year later had not fully recovered from the experience. It's not funny having three days on the sick after just one night on the pop.

"It was therefore Mick Rowley's phone call that really started the CONSORT ball rolling as he, who has swallowed the Blarney Stone whole, convinced me the time was long overdue to at least make a try at contacting as many of the lads as possible.

"Starting from scratch, telephone directories were the main source but with Christian names the problem. I well remember that fateful day however with at least a dozen 'Morgans' to choose from I found the right David on the first try and it was obvious the gods were smiling on us. I haven't been so chuffed since escaping to Guzz Barracks in 1952 after twelve months on the FLINT CASTLE. Talk about hard ships. After the telephone directories search things were made relatively easy as shipmates like John Brewer, Roy Blake-Hicks and Mick Corbett came into the fold at an early stage and all had a radar-like instinct for tracking down other ex-CONSORTS.

"Who would have thought that just six months after the mini-reunion of fourteen shipmates at the Fleet Club in September 1992, more than a hundred CONSORT's and their partners would be swinging the lamp together at the same venue. Long may it continue."

Some of the CONSORT's like Jack Consadine were living abroad but still managed to catch up with their old shipmates. Terry Hodgins remembered their meeting. "Lieutenant Jack Consadine was a well-liked and respected

officer on board the destroyer in the period 1948 to 1950 when I was serving as a Boy Seaman in the ship. On the day of the Yangtze Incident, 20 April 1949, his skill and bravery as the Navigating Officer during CONSORT's three attempts to rescue HMS AMETHYST were recorded in a special Order of the Day issued by the Commander-in-Chief, British Far East Fleet.

“Whilst attempting to form the HMS CONSORT Association in early 1992, I was contacted by Jack who told me that a few years after leaving CONSORT for the last time, he had transferred to the Royal Australian Navy, rising to the rank of Commander before retiring. He then added that CONSORT had always had the fondest memories for him and that he was determined to attend the First Reunion of the Association scheduled for 1993. I was glad to help in *smoothing his path* and he was profuse in his thanks.

“When we finally met up at the Devonport Fleet Club in 1993, Jack handed me an envelope containing AMETHYST's distress signal that had instigated the events that came to be known as ‘The Yangtze Incident’. He told me that I should protect it as carefully as he had until I decided it was time for it to go to a good home. Sadly, he died within a year of our Reunion at Devonport in 1993. He will never be forgotten by his CONSORT shipmates.”

At one of the reunions Tom Flanagan was able to tell the story of the *unexploded* shell in the destroyer's Boiler room. “They found the shell on top of the boiler a few days after the action. It was at my action station by the Boiler room hatch where I was waiting, ready to be despatched to cover any emergency. A jolting thud hit near to where I was standing. I thought Wow! That was very close and went to look over the side to see if I could see anything; there was a large hole just above the waterline on the port side. I immediately thought, Hell! That's the Boiler room.

“I hurried to the Boiler room hatch and peered through

the glass port but nothing seemed amiss. I then looked for steam but all was clear. I now opened the hatch and went inside, closing the hatch after me, and after peering through the viewing port carefully opened the door into the Boiler room just a fraction expecting steam to come out. There was nothing. I now opened the door and went inside. The two lads in there both looked up and seeing me asked what it was like up top. I told them they had a nice soft cushy number down here and out of danger. They then asked what I was doing down in the Boiler room. I didn't tell them why I was there, simply saying that I had come to see if everything was okay. I checked but there were no visible traces of any damage, not even a mark on any of the lagging on the pipework and there were masses of it. Not a sign of any shell coming in.

“I went back to my action station and was quickly in the thick of it, forgetting all about the shell in the Boiler room. Shortly after, I was wounded and forgot about everything. It was some years later when I was told of an unexploded shell that had been found a few days after the action sitting on top of the boiler. When I finally met the stoker at one of our reunions, the same stoker who was down in the Boiler room, and then related to him my story he just stared at me and shook his head, perhaps wondering why I hadn't said something at the time.” It should be noted by the reader that a warship's ammunition magazines and boiler room (with its pressurised steam) are the most vulnerable parts of the ship and if hit directly by a shell can easily be the end of that ship, causing a massive explosion. Though the action on the Yangtze had ended two days earlier, CONSORT and her crew were still in great danger from the unexploded shell which could easily have gone off, blowing the ship out of the water.

Fate often works in strange and mysterious ways. Paul Morrison who has helped put together the story of HMS CONSORT in *Loyal and Steadfast* remembers his own

small involvement with the ship long after it had gone to the breakers. "It was 1997 and I was working as a volunteer for a Naval Museum in Sydney, (the Museum has since relocated to a heritage-listed building in Franklin, Tasmania). I had a day job with a shipping company in Sydney but in my lunchtimes I often visited the second-hand bookshops and shops selling military memorabilia to see what I could pick up for the Museum. There was one shop I had visited a few days previous to buy some old Navy postcards, and as the owner was expecting some more stock later that week I thought I would pay him another visit.

"It was only a small shop in an arcade and in the window were displayed various military medals from different periods as well as old coins and stamp covers. Before entering the shop I glanced at the medals in the window and was surprised to see a medal which had only been placed in the window that morning. It was an inscribed General Service Medal with Bar: YANGTZE 1949. Though the price was a bit steep, after examining the inscription which read: 'D/JX.818257 H.G. ANDREWS ORD SMN R.N.' I immediately bought the medal knowing it would be an important addition to the Museum. The next question was to find out in which of the four ships Ordinary Seaman H. G. Andrews had served.

"We sent off a letter to the HMS AMETHYST Association and received an immediate reply from the HMS CONSORT Association. Terry Hodgins, the Acting Secretary/Treasurer promptly put us in touch with his shipmate, Andy Andrews who in turn advised us he had been forced to sell the medal when he had fallen on difficult times some years before. On a brighter note, the medal is to be placed on permanent display to the public in the Museum next year, the 60th Anniversary of the Yangtze Incident, along with other items (many relating to HMS CONSORT) in a display case kindly donated to the

Museum by the HMS CONSORT Association. Fate does indeed work in strange and mysterious ways. Who would have thought that the memory of HMS CONSORT would be preserved in a Naval Museum in Tasmania, on the other side of the world!”

Others too have been touched by the name CONSORT. One of these is Bryan Jervis who was a Boy Seaman in the same class as Terry Hodgins at the training establishment HMS ST.VINCENT. Though he never served in CONSORT, Brian Jervis (a career Navy man who retired with the rank of Lieutenant) was welcomed into the Association as a full member. “I have attended four annual gatherings of the CONSORT Association and feel that I must record the great deal of pleasure that I have experienced in the company of such dedicated shipmates. Their light-hearted banter throughout these Reunions masked the concern each felt for the other as to their well-being, particularly those who had been wounded whilst serving in the ship. It is akin to being welcomed into the home of a large family whose love and affection for each other never seems to diminish but rather increases as the years go by.”

It would appear that the name CONSORT pops up in the most unexpected of places. Ex-Signalman Wally Turner who served in the ship during its 1950 – 52 Commission won a trip to Hong Kong in 1986 and found one of these unexpected places. “I marvelled at the changes in Hong Kong since my last visit in 1950 when I was a signalman in HMS CONSORT. The additions included an underground railway system, a road tunnel under the harbour, elevated roadways and Happy Valley, where the Navy used to play all its soccer and rugby matches and which was now the site of a huge stadium and racecourse.

“It was a couple of days before my wife Beryl and I found the new China Fleet Club now housed in an eight storey building not far from the one I had known in the 50s.

During the visit I spoke with the manager who, on learning I was an ex-member of the *old* China Fleet Club gave us temporary membership for the time we were in Hong Kong. The club had an excellent restaurant called, The *AMETHYST* Room, and then much to my delight there was also a *CONSORT* Lounge, both named after two of the ships involved in the Yangtze Incident in 1949. The lounge was beautifully furnished and at the entrance was an impressive glass painting of the HMS *CONSORT* crest placed above its proud motto.”

There are also other ways in which the ship is still remembered. In September 2002, a state of the art Navigational Training Facility was opened at HMS *COLLINGWOOD* with one of the two Main Bridge simulators named in honour of HMS *CONSORT*, honouring the part the ship played in the Yangtze Incident.

The *CONSORT* Bridge simulator trains officers from many of the world’s Navies whose jobs entail working on the bridge of a warship: commanding officers, navigators, communicators etc. At the entrance to the simulator hangs a wonderful painting of *CONSORT* by the artist Mary Neads, together with a framed history of the ship and a true account of the action in which the ship suffered 40% casualties, including the ten who were killed. In other ways though this naming honour also encompasses the ship’s life as a whole, and the fine work she carried out in the Far East during nearly all of her service in the Navy, always adhering to her motto of *Loyal and Steadfast*.

*From near at hand and far away,  
We’ve come together here today.  
To swing the lamp and tell tall tales,  
Recall past years and sink some ales.  
Lord, bless us all, and bless our food,  
And keep us in a cheerful mood. Amen.*



## ADDENDUM

### I

#### HMS CONSORT SHIP'S COMMANDING OFFICERS

(1947) Lieutenant Commander G. T. Gray DSC Bar

(1948) Lieutenant Commander J. C. Cartwright MID,  
DSC

(1948) Commander J. Jefferis (Captain D) DSC

(1948 – 49) Commander I. G. Robertson MID, DSC  
Bar, DSO

(1950 – 52) Commander J. R. Carr OBE

(1952 – 54) Commander P. E. Yonge DSC

(1954) Commander R. G. H. G. Eyres

(1955 – 57) Commander R. B. MacKenzie MVO, MBE

Notes: Lieutenant Commander Cartwright was awarded his DSC for command of HMS BEAGLE in 1941. Commander Yonge was awarded his DSC for involvement in Assault Group, Operation Neptune (D-Day) in 1944. Commander MacKenzie was awarded his MVO for command of HMS QUALITY in 1945 and MBE for HMY BRITANNIA Royal Tour in 1954.

Sources: Seedies Roll of Naval Honours & Awards 1939 – 1959; London Gazette; Navy Lists.

The HMS CONSORT Association would like to express their gratitude to Margaret Newman of the Royal Naval Museum, Portsmouth and to Commander Ken Ridley of the Royal Naval Officers Association for their kind assistance in helping to obtain information pertaining to the ship's commanding officers.

## II

Extracts from the **BATTLE DAMAGE REPORT** prepared for the Admiralty by the ship. These cover the events of 20 April, 1949.

### Cause, Nature and Extent of Damage

The ship was hit by the following 68 projectiles:

|            |              |
|------------|--------------|
| 105 mm     | 5 in number  |
| 75mm       | 12 in number |
| 37mm       | 37 in number |
| Small arms | 14 in number |

All hits were above the waterline and a considerable number of the projectiles passed right through the ship before bursting. Details are given for only the more serious hits. The 37mm shells in particular caused a lot of damage by cutting electric cables, and, as practically all of them hit the bridge superstructure affected the control of the ship to a marked degree.

1. 105mm H.E. (high explosive) with ballistic cap. (Fired from) 1000 yards on the port beam. Below gun. Projectile penetrated ship's side and burst after it had travelled about six feet. Detonation complete. With the exception of the ballistic cap, no splinters found larger than two inches long. Hole in ship's side about six inches in diameter, and large ragged hole in internal bulkheads about two feet square. Caused a small fire which was rapidly extinguished.

2. 105mm H.E. 1000 yards on the starboard beam. Right forward in the forepeak. Burst on impact. Complete detonation. No fragments found more than two inches long. Jagged hole in side plating about eighteen inches square.

3. 105mm H.E. 900 yards on the port beam. On the port oiling bollard. Burst on impact. Detonation complete. No splinters found, no holes more than two inches long. Splinters caused damage within a radius of ten feet. Crew

of the port Oerlikon were wounded by splinters. Splinters also damaged the cables and bulkheads in Captain's cabin.

4. 105mm H.E. 1500 yards on the port beam. On the stern whaler abreast the funnel. The shell apparently burst on the stern of the whaler. detonation complete. No splinters found, but the funnel had holes about one inch square. Splinters also damaged the oil tank for the port single Bofors. Port single bofor only usable by hand pump.

5. 75mm Armour Piercing. 1000 yards on port beam. Amidships under bridge structure. Through bathroom, across port passage, into Trans-mitting station through pedestal of the Admiralty Fire Control Clock and burst in the Tallboy. Distance 12 feet. Detonation complete, fragments (found) of base various sizes. Head of shell remained in one piece. Serious damage to Transmitting station equipment. Round holes about five inches in diameter through ship's side and two internal bulk heads. Considerable damage to electric cables. Guns had to revert to Local Control.

6. 75mm Armour Piercing. 1000 yards on port beam. Amidships under the bridge structure. Through heads, across port passage, into W/T (Wireless Transmission) office to burst in far corner. Distance 12 feet. Detonation complete. Head of shell remained in one piece. Round holes about five inches in diameter through ship's side. Splinters cut electric cables and smashed W/T equipment. Emergency W/T set aft brought into use.

7. 75mm Armour Piercing. 1000 yards on port beam. Amidships under bridge structure. Through store, along cross passage, into 293 office (housing the 293 Radar) to burst against starboard side. Detonation complete. Head of shell remained complete. Round holes about five inches in diameter through ship's side. Splinters cut electric cables, 293 office out of action.

8. 75mm Armour Piercing. 1000 yards on port beam. Amidships under bridge structure. Through Engineers

workshop, across the passage, into the Gyro room to burst against the bulkhead. Distance 10 feet. Detonation complete, head of shell remained complete. Hole about five inches in diameter in ship's side, and two internal doors. Splinters cut electric cables and pierced bulkheads. Gyro out of action.

9. 75mm Armour Piercing. 900 yards on the starboard quarter. Through the Plot, into the wheelhouse. Detonation complete. No fragments. Small holes in bulkheads. Shell killed the Coxswain and wrecked the steering gear in the Wheelhouse. Many electric cables cut. Ship had to steer from Tiller flat. The plotting table and bulkhead instruments in the Plot were wrecked by this and other projectiles.

10. 75mm Armour Piercing. 900 yards on the port beam. Amidships under 'B' gun. Through canteen into Boys' mess deck where it burst. Distance 12 feet. Detonation complete. Fragments of base all small. Head of shell remained in one piece. Round holes about five inches in diameter through ship's side and internal bulkheads. A dent about one inch deep in deck plate where bursts occurred. A little damage to woodwork. Caused casualties to forward supply party. Burst occurred in a box of Oerlikon ammunition, some of which exploded and caused a small fire. It is surprising that so little of the ammunition exploded.

11. 37mm Anti-Tank. 1000 yards on the starboard beam. On the barrel of 'A' gun. The projectile hit just above the centre line of the barrel. No detonation. Solid projectile. Hole in gun barrel about six inches long by an inch and a half. 'A' gun out of action. The easy piercing of the barrel is an indication of the very high velocity of this projectile.

12. 37mm Anti-Tank. 900 yards on the starboard beam. 'B' gun shield. The projectile cut a guard rail stanchion, passed through the gun shield, through the trainer and smashed the hand power clutch. 'B' gun temporarily out of

action.

13. 37mm Anti-Tank. 900 yards fine on the starboard quarter. On the Director Support. Projectile penetrated the Director Support, ricocheted around in the support. No detonation. Solid projectile. Hole about one foot long by two inches wide in Director Support. Projectile cut the Director Training and Firing circuits so all guns had to revert to Gun layers Firing.

#### Damage Control

As soon as the ship got under way the following damage control organisation was put into effect.

All X, Y and Z openings were closed.

Engine room personnel not on watch went to Damage Control Station. The forward 20 ton pump and gear room fire and bilge pump were on the fire main which was isolated amidships. Ships fresh water tanks full. The forward group of oil fuel tanks all full and about 20 stowed aft. Fires occurred on the forward mess deck and in the pistol room. All extinguished by using Nuswif and Foamite.

There was no shortage of damage control equipment. Emergency lighting proved adequate. Automatic emergency lanterns were invaluable. Hand lamps and torches used extensively. The fire control and ship's broadcasting systems were out of use. Cables cut by projectiles.

When steering gear and telegraphs were damaged orders to the Engine Room were passed by telephone from the bridge. This was done by using the Telephone Control Box on the bridge. Caused congestion due to heavy usage. Highlights the need for direct telephones between bridge and engine room and between both boiler rooms.

Damage control parties did a great deal of work on ammunition supply; the need was aggravated by the present reduced complement.

## Shipwright Department

The ship sustained sixteen hits near the water line. The ones closest to the water line were temporarily plugged with canvas and wedges during a lull in the action. On anchoring, HMS LONDON made repairs by welding. Materials were adequate for the limited damage of this nature that was sustained.

### III

**CASUALTIES** in the Action fought on 20 April, 1949. Casualties sustained constituted a quarter of the ship's company.

#### KILLED

Petty Officer Telegraphist John Cecil Ackhurst  
Stoker Mechanic Raymond George Gifford  
Chief Petty Officer Maurice James Gurney  
Able Seaman Neville Douglas Hutton  
Ordinary Telegraphist Dennis Iredale  
Ordinary Seaman Sidney Jenkinson  
Leading Seaman William Moir  
Petty Officer Albert Morton  
Ordinary Seaman Charles Victor Theay  
Electricians Mate John Tobin

#### SERIOUSLY WOUNDED (amputees who survived)

Stoker Mechanic Thomas James Flanagan  
Stoker Mechanic Selwyn Rose

In addition 32 other members of the ship's company, including the Commanding Officer, Commander I. G. Robertson sustained wounds of varying degrees (mostly shrapnel). A number of minor casualties went unrecorded and nearly 40% of the ship's complement was in some way wounded or injured during the action.

In his subsequent medical report Surgeon Lieutenant Mark Bentley wrote: All the cases received Morphia when first seen and later 300,000 units Penicillin. Many of the wounded may have had further operative treatment in the Royal Naval Hospital, Hong Kong. I should like to record the wonderful behaviour of the casualties during and after the action. As it was my first action I was deeply impressed. I was privileged to serve under such a fine Commanding Officer as Commander I. G. Robertson DSC RN, in whom I had the greatest confidence and who did

everything in his power for me.

*The Yangtze River dead stay shipmates of our youth  
while others like us, knew the passing of the years.  
'Loyal and Steadfast' we are one ship's company,  
in comradeship and faith that conquers death.  
We will remember them. Amen.*





## 1947 – 1950 Commission



**Back Row** (left to right): Fred Parnell (1953 – 54 Commission);  
Reg Brown; Terry Hodgins; Derek Roberts

**Centre Row** (left to right): Norman Birt; Bill Tucker; Jess  
Grieve; George Andrews; Norman Cotton; Jim Flanagan

**Front Row** (left to right): Peter Cawley; Don Lockett; Jim Finch;  
David Morgan; Doug Ford; Ron Howell

## 1950 – 1953 Commission



**Back Row** (left to right): Ray Shelton; Derek Buck; Tom Edwards;  
Ian Grant; Derek Polgrean; Alan Southern; Jess Grieve; Terry  
Hodgins; Jim Finch; George Andrews

**Front Row** (left to right): Tony Lynch; David Morgan; Doug  
Sayles; Don Fowler; George Jones;

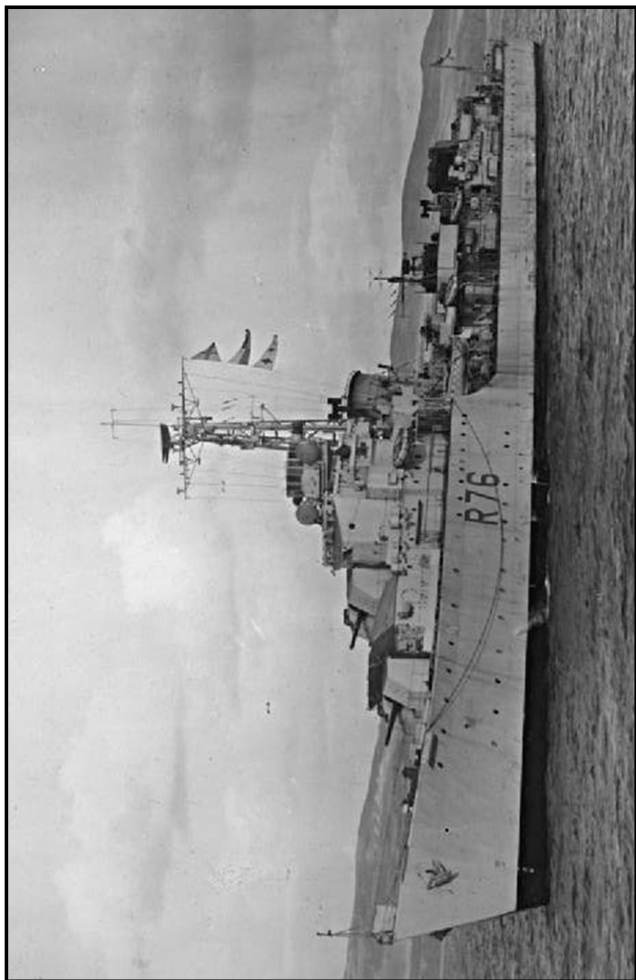
## 1953 – 1957 Commission



**Back Row** (left to right): Derek Buck; Andy Pullar; Tug Wilson;  
Derek Knowles; Ray Shenstone

**Centre Row** (left to right): Tom Edwards; Doug Sayles;  
Keith Buxton; John Holder; Willy Leitch

**Front Row** (left to right): Dennis Cunliffe; Reg Tregunna;  
Colin Bond; Jim Finch; Graham Perrett; Ken Clee



HMS CONSORT in 1946, shortly after commissioning.



HMS CONSORT in Hong Kong, 1948.  
Her pennant no. was changed to D76 shortly after.



### **In Memory of...**

Terry Hodgins who passed away peacefully on 30 September 2020, aged 89.

Tom Flanagan who passed away on 29 October 2020, aged 92.



