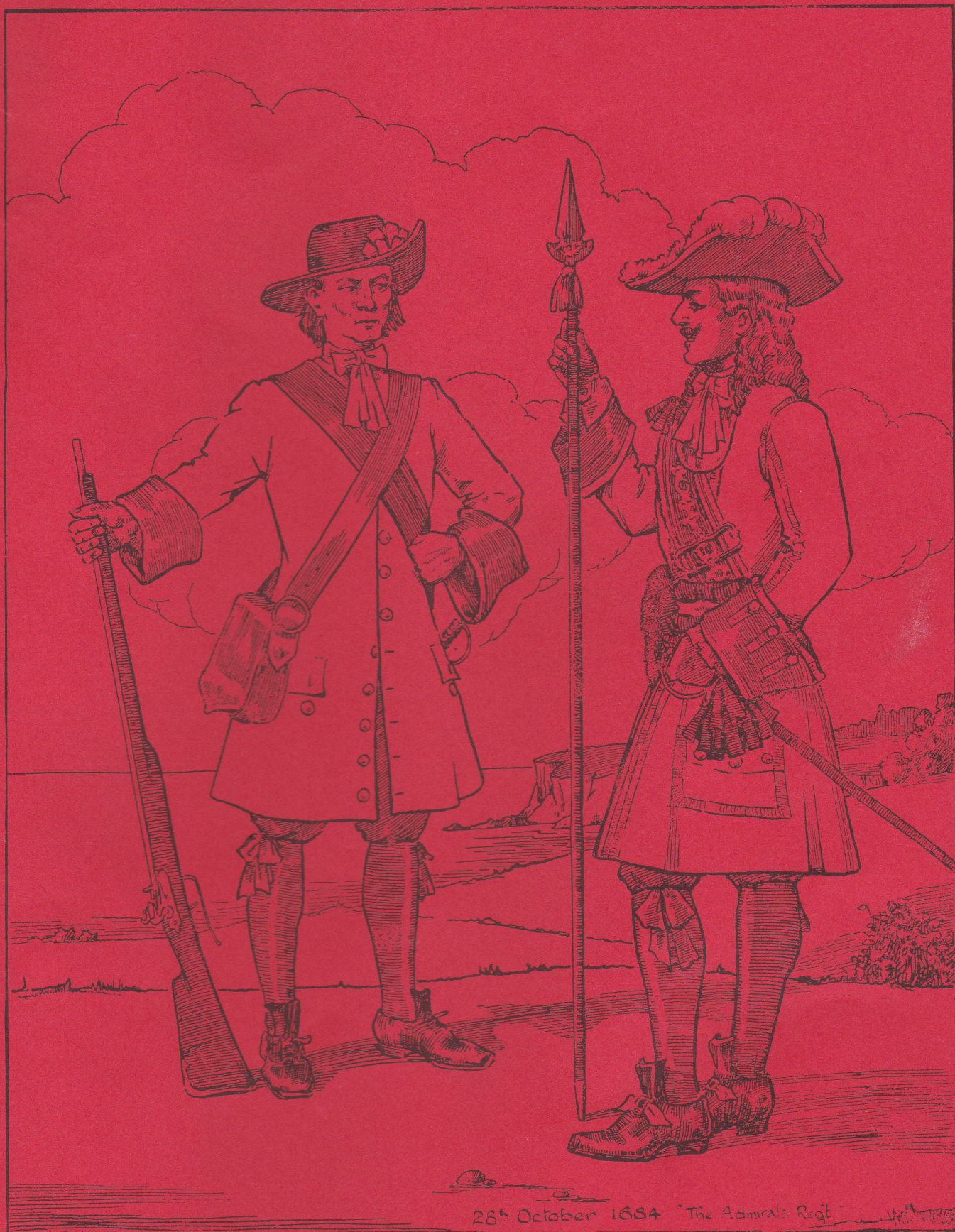




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SHEET ANCHOR

Volume XV Number 1



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THE SHEET ANCHOR

Volume XV Number 1

SUMMER 1990

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THE IRASCIBLE MAJOR ROBERT ROSS

When Major Robert Ross learned early in October 1786, that a detachment of Marines was to guard the First Fleet on its way to Botany Bay, he was among the first to volunteer. For the 46 year old Scot, this was the best thing that had happened to the corps since its involvement in the glorious action at Bunkers Hill at the beginning of the American War.

Why the Marines had been chosen instead of the Army was none of the major's business. Others could worry about that. Meanwhile, he had been appointed to command the detachment and he meant to see that his marines acquitted themselves with honour.

As he wrote to his patron, Evan Nepean, Under Secretary for the Colonies: "A good performance at Botany Bay will rescue the corps from the obscurity in which it has been for so long."

Less than four years after arriving at Botany Bay, however, the Marines were on their way back to England - and the colony sighed with relief.

The detachment owed its unpopularity almost entirely to Major Ross, to his personal touchiness and irascibility and to his near-insane determination to protect the honour of the corps whatever the cost.

Originally founded by Charles II in 1664, the Marines had known a continuous existence only since 1755, when war loomed once again with the old enemy across the Channel, the French.

A newly organised Marine Corps, including the very young Second Lieutenant Robert Ross, was in the vanguard of a British force under General Wolfe which scaled the Heights of Abraham and took Quebec from the French in 1759. But the Marines were everywhere in the Seven Years War - in Canada, India, the West Indies, even in the far-off Phillippines, where 300 of Britain's sea-soldiers helped capture Manila from the Spanish in 1762.

But as useful as they were in times of war, they had little standing in peacetime Army officers, who paid highly for their commissions, didn't mix in the society of mere Marine officers.

In 1786, the Marines were a minor branch of the Army establishment and Robert Ross, for all his honorary rank of brevet-major, had made no progress in his career since a promotion to captain in 1773. Thus, 27 years after Quebec, 11 years after Bunkers Hill, the veteran jumped at the chance when volunteers were called for Botany Bay.

Knowing little or nothing of the country to which he was going, he visualised the Marines defending the settlement against hostile Aborigines, even winning new battle honours as they repelled possible attacks on Botany Bay by the French, Spanish or Americans.

Even before the Fleet left Portsmouth, however, he saw how different the reality was going to be. All the power was being invested in Governor Phillip. While Ross was designated Lieutenant-Governor, Phillip was the one who would make the important decisions, and Phillip, as he quickly made clear didn't mean to consult Major Ross about anything.

An early example occurred on the voyage out. Four days before reach-

ing Capetown, Phillip divided his fleet into two, four vessels going on ahead of the remaining seven to prepare the ground.

It was a sensible arrangement. But why had he, the second-in-command, been almost the last to hear of the change of plan? This was the question Ross kept asking himself, and brooding over, for the rest of the voyage.

Finally, they arrived and it didn't take the major long to see that any military role for the detachment was just a dream. From the remoteness of their situation and the wretched state of the Aboriginal population, he guessed the Marines would be spending most of their time on sentry duty and acting as slave-drivers to the unfortunate convicts.

It was pretty much the way it turned out, although Ross never stopped fighting against what he saw as indignities from the day he landed on "that miserable shore".

Not formerly noted as a severe disciplinarian, he was savage when he caught any of his men thieving, fighting, breaking into the female prisoners' quarters, or otherwise carrying on like convicts.

On the evening of March 16, 1788, the colony was less than two months old when marines Hunt and Dempsey came to blows over a convict woman, Jane Fitzgerald. Joseph Hunt, the original aggressor, was charged with disorderly behaviour and a court-martial was convened under the presidency of Captain Watkin Tench.

He was found guilty but the sentence was rather unusual. Private Hunt was required to ask Private Dempsey's pardon before the whole battalion, or else receive 100 lashes from the drummers on his bare back. The major was speechless when he heard of the sentence, but not for long. No soldier had the right to choose his own punishment, he shouted at Tench.

Not only was it against martial law, it removed from the man's commanding officer all power to confirm or mitigate the decision of the court. He went on raving and cursing but he couldn't shake the determination of Tench and the four other young officers to stick by the original sentence.

So Ross had those five arrested as well and applied to Governor Phillip to have them tried for insubordination. Phillip managed to put him off for the moment, claiming he would have to refer the matter to England first.

The difficult Scot, was responsible enough when it came to maintaining the peace and good order of the little settlement and the governor had no complaints to make on that score. Yet, on other subjects, he just couldn't be reasoned with and he was making life unbearable for his officers. One of them, Lieutenant James Maxwell, actually went mad during his six months at Botany Bay.

Having been confined to hospital with an eye disease, the sick man was later found to have planted 70 guineas, neatly set out in long rows in the hospital garden. He had high hopes of a "good crop" the following year, he told the doctors.

The behaviour of Captain James Meredith was another source of embarrassment. One evening, Captain Meredith was rolling home, drunk as

usual, down Bridge St when he was tempted to visit 17 year old Sarah Bellamy, a well-known prostitute.

At the time, Sydney consisted merely of two streets of "miserable huts", according to one account. The officers' huts were in a row opposite the Marine barracks in George St. The convict huts were dispersed throughout The Rocks.

None had any windows beyond a lattice-work of sticks and, when the captain came to Sarah's house, he simply put his hand through and grabbed the girl by her red hair. She promptly began screaming and kept it up until the Sydney nightwatch arrived.

Meredith immediately demanded she be taken into custody. But the nightwatch, a body of convict constables since Ross didn't permit his men to perform constabulary duties was not to be bullied into submission by any officer.

Constable John Harris made sure the girl had a chance to tell her side of the story and, as a growing crowd listened in sympathy, Meredith decided not to go on with the case.

It was glaringly obvious that, after 18 months, Sydney was divided into two camps. The convicts, who had adopted Botany Bay as their home since few of them could ever expect to see England again, were in one camp. The marines were in the other.

For Robert Ross and his men, though, their worst moment had been in March 1789 after the Commissary, Andrew Palmer found that thieves had broken into the public store. A piece of a broken-off key was found in the padlock of the front door. Palmer took it to the blacksmith for identification and the blacksmith had no trouble recognising it as part of the key he had specially altered for Marine Joseph Hunt.

Hunt was the same man who had luckily escaped 100 lashes 12 months before. This time, he turned King's evidence and described how with six others, he had had the keys altered so they fitted any of three locks.

When one of the seven was posted as night guard at the street-door, the others could nip round to a back entrance and help themselves to as much as they could carry away.

It had been going on for months during which most of the group had been punished several times for drunkenness without the authorities having any idea where they were getting the liquor.

Yet even before news of this dire occurrence reached London, a new Secretary for the Colonies had decided to replace the Marines with a detachment of infantry, to be known as the NSW Corps† Six months later, however, Governor Phillip still had not been informed of the decision. (†New South Wales Corps)

His pre-occupation was with the famine, which was fast approaching the colony, and the only solution, as he saw it, was to divide his people in two and send half to cultivate the much more fertile Norfolk Island. It was also his chance to get rid of Major Ross.

And yet, if various accounts are true, the major was a changed man from the moment he landed on the island at the head of two companies

of Marines and a large convict labour force.

In Sydney, much of his time had been taken up in writing to the Admiralty to complain about Phillip. On Norfolk, he was his own master, free to concentrate exclusively on expanding the island's food resources. Ross spent 20 months there in which time he more than trebled wheat and potato production.

Those who didn't farm, Marines as well as convicts spent their time catching schnapper and hunting mutton-birds and the haul was prodigious-41,000 birds in three months, 1867 large schnapper in a typical fortnight.

Full bellies all round resulted in more work being done and, when the first NSW Corps arrived to take over, it saw a more flourishing settlement than the one which had recently greeted its arrival in Sydney.

In December, 1791 Robert Ross and the Marines duly returned to England. Two officers David Collins and George Johnston, chose to stay on, while about 40 Marine NCOs and privates had transferred to the NSW Corps.

As it turned out, those who returned with Ross were the ones who generally did best. Watkin Tench went on to become a lieutenant-general while James Meredith retired with the rank of major-general. There also had been more fighting for the Marines after the French Revolutionary Wars broke out in 1793.

Finally, by Royal Order of April 29 1802, the corps became known as the Royal Marines. Officially at least, the Marines now enjoyed parity with the Army. But Robert Ross didn't live to see that day.

His reputation having been virtually destroyed by what Governor Phillip had to say about his obstructive behaviour in Sydney, he was transferred soon after his return to recruiting duties around the countryside. Still a brevet-major, he died in London on June 9, 1794.

(Submitted by Cleve Whitworth and reprinted by kind permission of the Sydney Daily Mirror. This appeared under the title "Old marine major's dreams of glory died at Botany Bay" on 15 December 1988, and also featured in The Sun on 5 October 1989.)

FIGHTING MARINE - 'SAM' KERSLAKE

by Roger Perkins (RMHS)

Arthur John Kerslake, known as Sam to his friends, was born in Devon in 1896. Reaching his 18th birthday, he joined the Royal Marines Light Infantry on a twenty-one years' engagement. It was December 1914. He was given the service number Ply 17813 and posted to the Plymouth Division. Twelve months later he was fighting in the trenches in France as a member of 2nd Battalion RMLI.



In February 1916 the battalion fought at Miraumont, and then, in April, at Gavrelle. On the 27th of that month, his unit was given the task of assaulting the heavily fortified Gavrelle Mill. In support were 1st Bn RMLI and Anson Bn of the Royal Naval Division. The resultant carnage is graphically described in Blumberg's *Britain's Sea Soldiers*. The mill was stormed and held, but at heavy cost. Only B Company succeeded in breaking through the wire entanglements. After a bitter fight with boot, fist and bayonet, the German defenders were all killed or captured. The Marines held the mill against repeated counter attacks before being relieved by another unit twenty four hours later.

The remnants of the 2nd Bn were withdrawn to rest and absorb reinforcements. The scene then changed to the Eastern Mediterranean. Sam went to the island of Imbros, in the Aegean, where he served with 3rd RM Brigade for the remainder of the war. On 6th July, 1917, the *London Gazette* carried the announcement of awards for the battle of Gavrelle Mill. They were two Military Crosses, two Distinguished Conduct Medals and nineteen Military Medals (including one to Pte A J Kerslake).

Before examining his post war career, it is instructive to look at the award of the Military Medal to men of the Royal Marines Light Infantry and Royal Marine Artillery between 1916 (the year of its introduction) and 1920 (when the post-war campaigns fizzled out). A grand total of 115,577 MMs were awarded during that period (excluding bars). but only 316 of these medals went to the RMLI and RMA. They consisted of: the RMLI in France (146), the RMA in France (39), the Divisional Train (3), RM Medical Units in France (122), men serving in North Russia (3), and three RMA personnel on detachment to army units (Gnr Watson with 527 Bty RGA, and Cpl Naitby and BSM Usborne respectively with 71 and 75 Siege Btys, South African Heavy Artillery).

Of the 316 recipients, fifteen received additional bars; RMLI in France (5), RM Medical Units (9), and North Russia (1). The high proportion of awards to Medical units reflects the dedication and selflessness of *all* medical personnel in both World Wars, but most particularly the stretcher bearers of the Great War who suffered a very high casualty rate. In general terms, however, a Military Medal named to *any* Marine of the 1914-20

period must be regarded as a rarity. Less than 0.3% of such awards went to men of the Corps.

With the end of the war, Sam returned to Plymouth where he completed those aspects of his training which he had missed as an infantryman. He learned how to work as part of the gunnery team in a warship and then went to sea for the first time. The ship was HMS *Apollo*, and further sea-going drafts followed between 1920 and 1932; HMS *Resolution*, *Carysfort* and *Danae*. He had no ambition to rise through the ranks but was content to hold his rank of Marine to maintain his unblemished 'exemplary' record. In February of 1930 he received his 'blue', the Naval Long Service and Good Conduct Medal.

On the last day of 1935 he completed his twenty-one years' engagement, but immediately signed on for another year, then for two years more. At the end of 1938 he decided that he had had enough and took off his uniform for what he believed would be the last time. Back in his home town of Newton Abbot, Devon, he obtained a labouring job in the Bradley wool mills. A bachelor, he settled in with his sister. Less than two years later, his quiet life in this small market town was interrupted by a telegram from the Admiralty.

Recalled 'for the duration' on 1st September 1939, Sam was judged too old for front-line service. Instead, like hundreds of other middle-aged, long service former Marines and Royal Navy ratings, he was drafted to HMS *President III* (a pay and administrative shore base) and told that he would be serving in DEMS (Defensively Equipped Merchant Ships) as a 'pensioned gunner'.

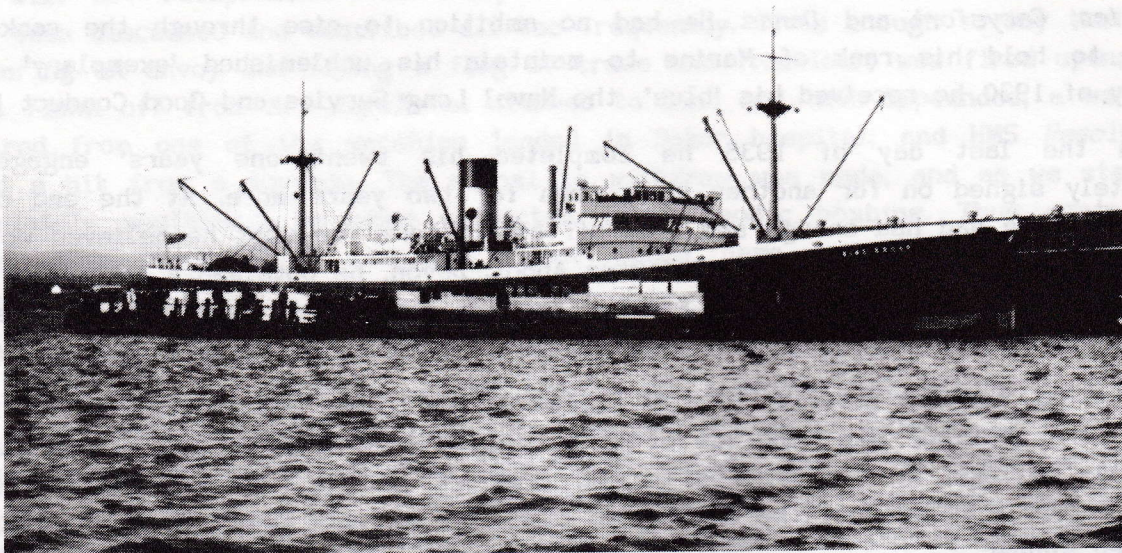
In contrast with the Admiralty policy in 1914, it was decided from the outset of the Second World War that merchant ships must, whenever practicable, be sailed in convoy, and be armed with defensive weapons. The story of the DEMS, and of the men who served at sea aboard British and Allied merchantmen as defensive gunners, has never been fully told. Perhaps one day it will receive the attention which it deserves. For the moment, we must follow Sam and his travels.

His first ship was the SS *King Edgar*, owned by King Lines and normally sailing from Cardiff and Swansea. Given the temporary acting rank of Sergeant, he took command of the 12-pounder mounted on her poop deck and the 4-inch gun on her forecastle. He had two other 'pensioned gunners' to assist in maintaining these weapons and training selected members of the ship's civilian crew.

Also drafted to the *King Edgar* were two soldiers, volunteers who had been transferred to the Maritime Anti-Aircraft Unit, Royal Artillery, to escape the limitations of conventional soldiering. They would provide the ship with additional short-range anti-aircraft defence by operating the Lewis machine-guns mounted on each bridge wing.

Their first trip was an uneventful voyage to Cape Town to load 7,500 tons of wheat destined for the Pool of London. It was followed by an even longer voyage, loaded with war stores, to Egypt and then around the Cape of Good Hope back to Swansea with more bulk grain. It was customary for DEMS personnel to transfer from one ship to another at the end of each voyage, according to operational needs and departure dates, but Sam was still serving in *King Edgar* when she made her third wartime trip, this time to Hobart, Tasmania.

On New Year's Day 1941, she formed up at Freetown, Sierra Leone, with nearly 100 other vessels for the final leg back to the United Kingdom. Convoy SL61 consisted mainly of coal-burning general cargo ships of the period, and their progress northwards would be determined by the best economical speed of the oldest and slowest. In this case, the planned speed of the convoy was nine knots (about ten land miles per hour). Foul weather



SS King Edgar, the 4,536 tons cargo ship, which so nearly fell victim to the Luftwaffe in 1940. She was to find her final resting place off the coast of South Wales in 1945.

could cut its speed by half, or less, and the small escort would be hard worked to keep its motley flock on course and on station.

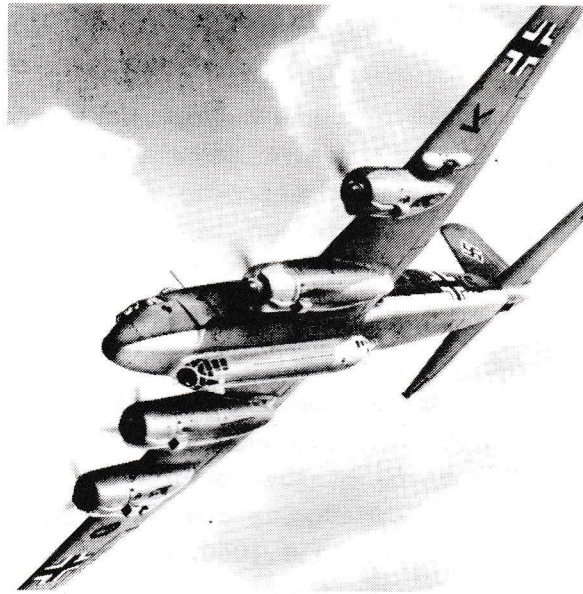
The convoy required nearly two weeks to approach British waters. A succession of gales hindered its progress and caused several ships to straggle behind the main body. Two of these were the *King Edgar* and a Dutch freighter, the *Heemskerk*. They were still battling to catch up, in the teeth of strong winds and a heavy sea, as dawn broke on 20th January. The convoy was now 500 miles due west of Galway Bay.

Captain Arthur Wheeler, the *King Edgar's* master, could see seventeen other ships ahead of him at a distance of four to five miles. The *Heemskerk* was five cables away on his port beam. They were making less than three knots against the north easterly gale. Cloud base was down to 500 feet and enemy action in these conditions seemed unlikely, but he had ordered his look-outs and gun captains to be on full alert. His caution was justified when, at 1100, a large four engined aircraft was seen approaching from the south. Flying just below the clouds, it commenced a shallow dive towards the *Heemskerk*.

Passing over the length of the Dutchman from dead astern, it released two 250kg bombs. One exploded alongside the ship, the other plunged through the after hatch covers and exploded within the hull. Fire broke out immediately, and the *Heemskerk* veered away to a rapid stop. She sank shortly afterwards.

The attack had been so swift that neither ship had time to open fire. The watchers aboard *King Edgar* saw the aircraft, now identified as a Focke Wolfe 200C Condor, making a long turn ahead of them and circling around to attack their own ship from astern. At three

miles range the German pilot levelled out for his bomb run. Sam and his gun crew discharged four rounds of high explosive before the Condor roared low over their heads. It is possible that this defensive fire may have damaged the release mechanism in the aircraft because it failed to drop any bombs on the *King Edgar*. However two streams of cannon and machine-gun fire raked her stern as the enemy's own gunners opened fire during the last mile of their approach.



A Focke Wolfe 200C Condor of the type which ranged far out into the Atlantic in search of convoys. The aircraft had a range of 2210 miles at 160 mph, with an endurance of 14 hours

Sam was hit in the neck and left knee by splinters of steel from the exploding cannon shells, and three of his men were also hit, but they all stayed at their posts. They were ready and waiting as the German pilot again circled the ship and made another run from astern. Again the Condor's gunners raked the *King Edgar* with cannon and machine gun fire, damaging the superstructure, wrecking a lifeboat, and destroying part of the de-gaussing gear, but causing no further casualties.

Sam's team fired three more rounds from the 12-pounder during this attack, one of them bursting under the Condor's nose. It may have inflicted further damage because having overflown the *King Edgar* and

having drawn three miles ahead, the German was seen to jettison his two remaining 250kg bombs into the sea. The aircraft then altered course and was last seen heading towards Ireland at a low altitude. Subsequent research indicates that any damage it may have suffered was not fatal. Presumably the pilot continued on the usual track for such flights, to Trondheim or Stavanger in Norway, or he may have turned back to his base at Bordeaux-Mérignac in Western France.

Following the attack, Captain Wheeler brought his ship safely into Belfast and then to Barry Dock, South Wales. Sam went for 14 days' leave and a visit to the local RN sick quarters where his wounds were found to be healing satisfactorily.

Unknown to him, his name was being forwarded for some sort of recognition. Captain Wheeler, in his report, had written: 'The accurate gunfire of the *King Edgar* went a long way towards not only driving the aircraft away, but saving the vessel also'. A covering note commented: 'The Master considers that the gun's crew saved the ship'. There was a clear need for an award, but the peculiar status of DEMS gunners presented the authorities with a difficult problem.

Sam Kerslake, and hundreds of others like him, were not entered in their ships' papers as members of the armed forces. They were described instead as 'deck hands'. They received their service pay from the Admiralty, or from the War Office if members of the Maritime Army Regiment, and were also paid an additional sixpence a day by the ships' owners, but the official line was that they were seamen of the civilian Merchant Navy. This pretence ensured that DEMS could call at neutral ports without being subject to the legal strictures and time limitations which had driven the *Graf Spee* out of Montevideo harbour.

in 1939. While in neutral ports, Sam and his fellow gunners were free to go ashore and were issued with 'official' civilian clothing for this purpose. If they had worn naval or military uniform, or had carried service identity documents, they would have been liable to arrest and internment.

Of equal importance was the need to make the DEMS gunners, who were almost all of non-commissioned ranks and rates, subject to the discipline of the ships' Master. By signing articles as civilian seamen, they were brought automatically within the requirements of the Merchant Shipping Act.

All of this created a strange anomaly with regard to honours and awards. There was no provision for men like Sam, officially a deck hand, to receive decorations intended exclusively for members of the armed forces. To announce in the *London Gazette* that a 'civilian' had been given a 'service' award might have jeopardised his claim to non-combatant status.

The *London Gazette* of 1st April 1941 announced that Mne A J Kerslake had been 'commended'. There were no other details. At the end of the war, when he received his campaign medals, he was issued with a 'mention in despatches' emblem in respect of the *King Edgar* episode (even though it could not have been gazetted as such at the time). There are similar anomalies in respect of other DEMS gunners of that period. For example, not a single man of the Maritime AA Regiment received the DSM during the first two years of the war, but there were fifty-one such awards between 1942 and 1946. Conversely, acts of bravery by members of the Regiment prior to 1942 were recognised by thirteen awards of the British Empire Medal (Civil Division).

The turning point came with Pearl Harbour and America's declaration of war. The isolationist lobby in Washington, which had previously wanted to stop British ships loading at American ports, was no longer a cause for anxiety. On 18th May 1942, acting upon a recommendation by the Committee on the Granting of Honours, Decorations and Medals, HM The King signed an authority for a major change. An Order in Council, issued by the Admiralty and dated 1st July stated: '*And whereas His Majesty has been graciously pleased to approve that Naval Ratings and Army Ranks serving in the Defensively Equipped Merchant Ships should be eligible for Naval Awards....*'. It was then confirmed that the previous ambivalence was finally resolved. Recommendations which until then had been handled by the War Office, the Admiralty and the Ministry of Transport, would henceforth be processed exclusively by the Admiralty. With the United States of America now totally committed to war with the Axis powers, there was no longer any need to conceal the truth about DEMS. But there would be no retroactive awards, so Sam's 'commendation' remained unaltered.

He made one more voyage in the *King Edgar*, calling over a period of five months at various ports around Africa and the Bay of Bengal. Leaving her in June 1942, he served during the next three years in a succession of other DEMS: the *Luminetta*, the *Pieter de Hoogh*, the *Castalia* and the *Empire Swordsman*. Their voyages took him again to India, three times across the perilous North Atlantic and, finally, to the Mulberry harbours of the Normandy beach-head. He was surprisingly lucky: none of his ships were sunk or even attacked. The need for constant vigilance, however, never slackened. As the senior gunner, it was his job to keep the guns crews on their toes and to oversee the proper maintenance of the weapons and ammunition. His efficiency came to notice, and his name went forward again for consideration for an award.

From the evidence, it seems that the recommendation was initiated by the Master of the *Castalia*, Captain D Morrison, and submitted to the Senior Naval Officer at Port Said when the ship called there on 20th March 1944. Sadly all of the original documents

concerning awards to RN and RM personnel serving in DEMS were destroyed by the Admiralty some years ago, and exhaustive enquiries have failed to reveal any details surrounding Sam's recommendation. All that can be said with certainty is that this name appeared in the *London Gazette* (King's Birthday Honours) dated 8th June 1944. Along with twenty-one other DEMS personnel, he had been awarded the Distinguished Service Medal under the preamble: *'For gallantry or outstanding service in the face of the enemy, or of zeal, patience and cheerfulness in dangerous waters, and for setting an example of wholehearted devotion to duty, upholding the high tradition of the Royal Navy'*.

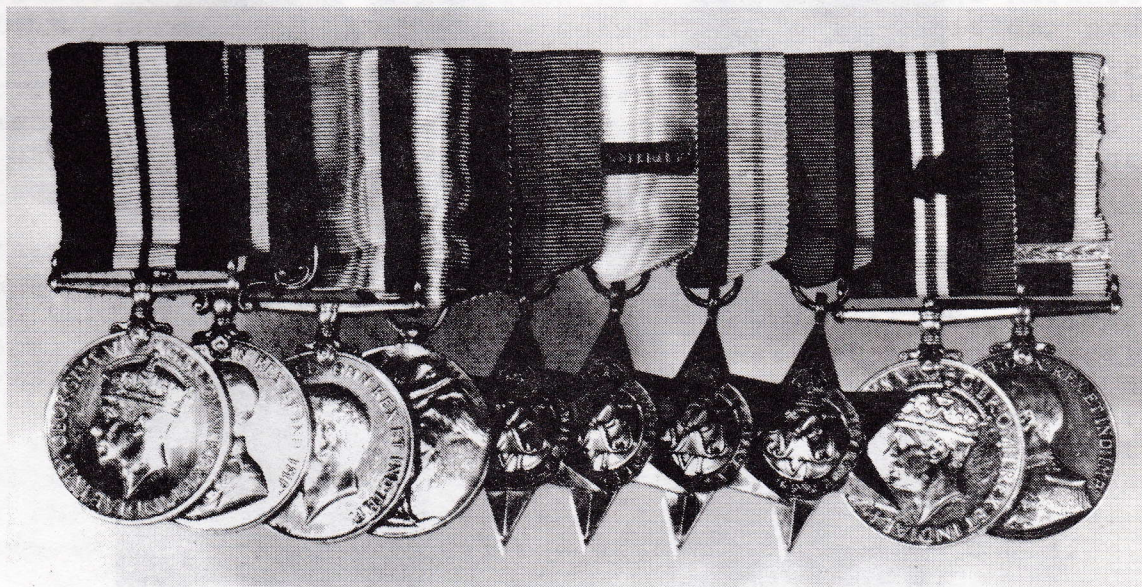
A total of 7,132 DSMs were awarded between 1939 and 1945, but only 195 (plus one bar) went to the Royal Marines. How many of these were employed in DEMS and how many in other types of service is not known, but it is probable that DEMS gunners were in the minority. It was largely a matter of 'out of sight, out of mind'.

In August 1945, Sam was told that his services were no longer required. He returned to his labouring job at the Bradley Mill and declined to tell his relatives anything of his six years at sea. The only comment recalled later by his sister was that he had 'had a rough time in Swansea'. The *King Edgar* was docked there on 20/21st February 1941 when the city and harbour were heavily bombed. The 12-pounder was a 'high angle' weapon, and may well have joined in the local anti-aircraft barrage.

When he died in 1977, aged 81, he left no papers. The only tangible evidence that he had ever existed was the group of medals bequeathed to Mrs Vera Cheshire, his sister. And the medals were almost as enigmatic as the durable old Marine himself.

He had completed thirty-one years of 'exemplary' service. Although familiar with his career, I did not realise until 1981 that something was amiss. His Naval LS & GC Medal did not have an 'additional service' clasp. Surely he must have been so entitled? Correspondence with a fellow collector provided the answer.

On 3rd May 1945, Admiralty Fleet Order (AFO) 2253 had announced: *'It has been decided to issue a clasp for the RN and RFR Long Service and Good Conduct Medals in the case of*



Acting Temporary Sergeant 'Sam' Kerslake's group of medals. From left: DSM, MM, British War Medal 1914-20, Victory Medal 1914-18, 1939-45 Star, Atlantic Star (with clasp France & Germany), Africa Star, Burma Star, War Medal 1939-45 (with Mention in Despatches oak leaf), Naval Long Service and Good Conduct Medal (with clasp)

ratings holding the medal who have completed a further fifteen years' service under the conditions governing the original award'. The problem was that AFOs were distributed only to naval vessels and shore establishments, and hence could only be seen by men currently serving in them. They were not published elsewhere. Retired pensioners, and those serving in DEMS, had no access to AFOs and therefore did not know they were entitled to raise a claim. And the clasp would be issued only to men who applied for it on the appropriate form. The initiative lay with the man, not the Admiralty.

In late 1981, I advised Mrs Cheshire, as next-of-kin, to contact the Drafting and Records Office, Royal Marines. Within a fortnight the ever efficient staff at DRORM approved the claim. The clasp arrived a few days later, and I hastily appended it to the original medal in time for a formal presentation. On 28th January 1982, Mne A J Kerslake's astonishing group of awards, made complete after a gap of thirty-eight years, was handed back to Mrs Cheshire at a reception at the Officers' Mess, Stonehouse Barracks, Plymouth. It was the establishment where Sam had begun his service career in 1914. The presenting officer was Maj Gen J J Moore OBE, MC*. In the words of the staff officer who arranged the ceremony: 'Once a Marine, always a Marine. The Corps never forgets.'



Maj Gen Jeremy Moore OBE MC* with 'Sam' Kerslake's surviving sister, Mrs Vera Cheshire at Stonehouse Barracks in January 1982 at the presentation of his extraordinary medal group

Various lessons emerge from the Sam Kerslake story. First anyone attempting to trace the ship-to-ship movements of a former DEMS gunner is faced with a formidable task. This article was ten years in the making. Secondly, although Military Medal awards to Marines of the 1914-20 period are rarely found, those which do surface are comparatively easy to research. Blumberg's magnificent work gives most of the dates, locations and circumstances leading to each award. Thirdly there must be a number of LS & GC Medals of the King George V series which ought to carry an 'additional service' clasp, but which do not. Careful research, and a lot of luck, may permit other collectors to trace unclaimed entitlements. Fourth, now that *Seedie's Roll* has been published, everyone has the chance to research Mentions in Despatches which previously seemed uninspiring. Some may reveal engagements just as dramatic as the *King Edgar* action.

As a footnote, the plucky *King Edgar* continued her travels around the world until 2nd March 1945. Then, with the war almost over, her luck ran out. Sailing in convoy up the Irish Sea, still under the command of Captain A W Wheeler, she was torpedoed and sunk by Kpltn Wolfgang Herwartz in U-1302. A 'Gnat' homing torpedo exploded under her stern and blew it off. Several crewmen were injured, and three were trapped and drowned below decks. Amongst the dead was a lad named Peter Roche. He was one of the last DEMS gunners to die in the war.

Five days later the U-1302 was hunted down and depth-charged to destruction by three frigates of the Royal Canadian Navy, *La Hulloise*, *Strathadam* and *Thetford Mines*. There were no survivors.

LONGEST SERVING DETACHMENT -FURTHEST FROM HOME?

In the year following the arrival of the First Fleet in Australia, Captain Arthur Phillip formed what was then called the 'Row Boat Guard'. Their duties were to protect the ships of the Royal Navy in the colony. The location of this guard was at Watson's Bay, Goat Island, Garden Island and Cockatoo Island; and they also carried out patrols of Sydney Cove. It would appear that the passing of letters between convicts was rife and, of course, the escaping of convicts on arrival in the ships bringing them to Australia.

Additions to this guard were added as the ships and shore establishments got larger. A bitty situation developed until 1867 when a detachment of the Royal Marines Light Infantry arrived with the brief to take over all the various duties under one command. This guard remained in continuous duty until relieved by the newly formed Naval Dockyard Police on 1st July 1913, a total of 46 years! This must be one of, if not the longest serving detachment the Corps ever provided. But perhaps someone knows better.

It is interesting to read the reason for the relief of this detachment. At the Imperial Conference of 1911, the following statement was issued:

'The policing of the three establishments carried out by Imperial Marines should end as it is not proposed to have Royal Marines in the Commonwealth Forces and it will be necessary to have a special Police Force to carry out these duties.'

This was the birth of the Australian Navy Police as of today. It is also interesting to note the title of *Imperial Marines* used at the 1911 conference. I do not recall having seen the reference before. It is understood that quite a number of the detachment transferred to the new Force and remained in Australia to end their days.

Submitted by Frank Agass

Major Louis Rotely Recalls Trafalgar

Major Louis Rotley, RM, who made this speech at Swansea was a marine subaltern in the "VICTORY" at Trafalgar. He retired in 1814 and died at Swansea in 1861. He saved four persons from drowning in the course of his life. A scholarship was founded at the Royal Naval School, Eltham, in his memory. Many years after his retirement his fellow citizens of Swansea presented him with a ring on the anniversary of Trafalgar, a gift he acknowledged in the following words.

"Mr Chair and Gentlemen-Friends and fellow townsmen, labouring under extreme illness I rise to return thanks for the honour conferred in drinking my health and for presenting me with this ring. During my career I have received many tokens of regard, among which is a splendid sword with a Damascus blade, a gold snuff-box, several medals, a present from a President of the United States of America, and from several Indian Chiefs, also a valuable consideration from the Patriotic Fund for wounds, etc, but none do I prize more than this elegant ring, which must now become an heirloom.

Having seen but half the world, I have a longing desire to see the other. The first port that will bring me up will be Aboukir Bay at the mouth of the Nile, where the immortal hero whose death this ring is intended to commemorate, as an Admiral gained his first grand victory. At Copenhagen he had to contend against the genius of Napoleon, who had united in one grand league the Fleets of Denmark, Sweden and Russia, with the hope of crushing the naval supremacy of Great Britain. Nelson was sent against them, and the Northern Confederation vanished in smoke.

His last and most decisive victory was at Trafalgar, in which I had the honour to take a part. Trafalgar was my first essay, and never shall I forget my father's advice on my being appointed to the VICTORY; he was an old seaman, and had fought against the celebrated Paul Jones in the first American War. "Louis," said he, "you will soon be in battle-I foresee a tremendous contest, but whatever you do, be sure to keep your head erect in battle, never bow to a Frenchman's shot, it is folly, for when you hear the balls whistle you are safe, the ball has passed harmless before you can hear it," and amid the carnage and the thousands of cannon balls that whistled past my head on that memorable day, well did I recollect my father's advice. I bore a charmed life then, as I have upon many occasions since.

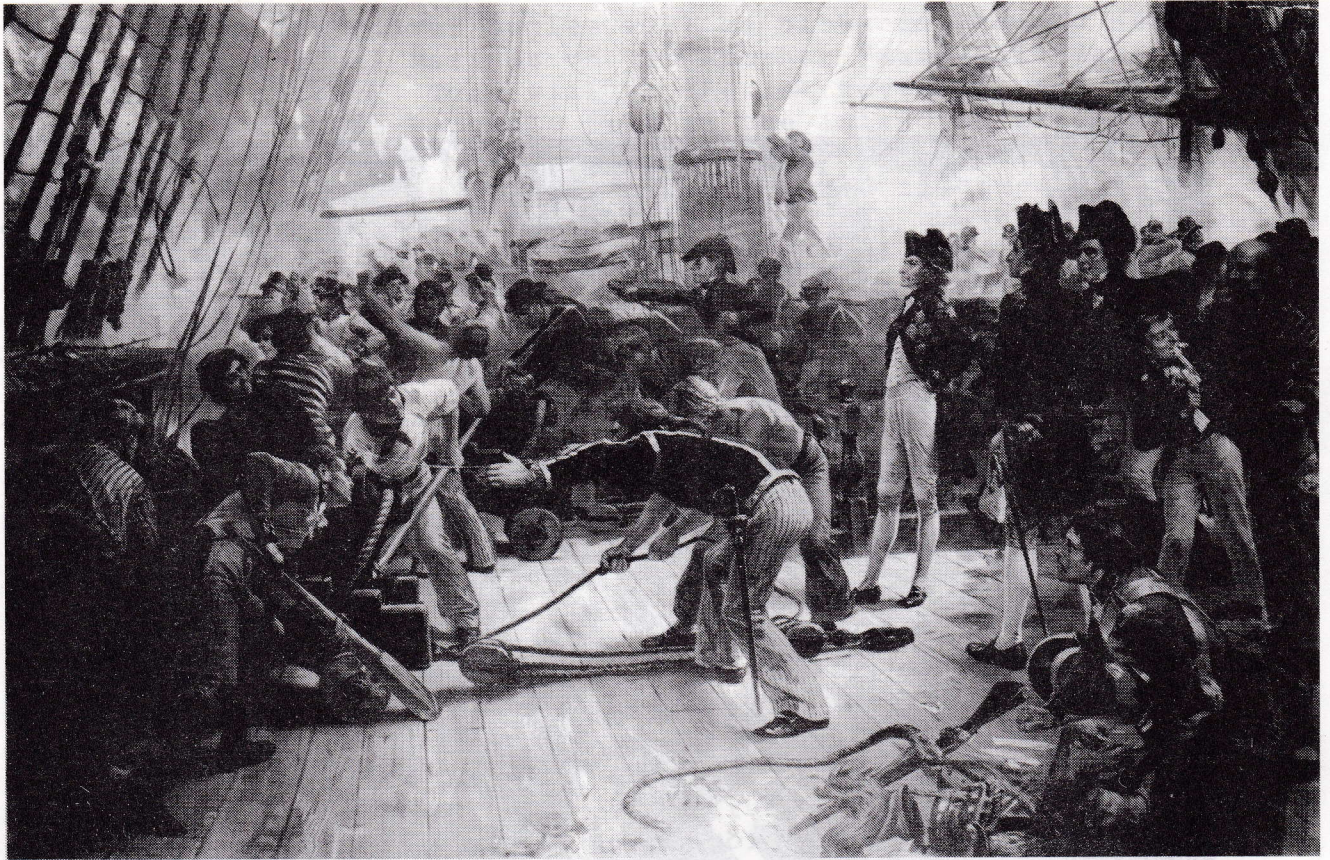
Previous to breaking the enemy's line their fire was terrific. The VICTORY was steering for the four-decker,* when four ships ahead and four astern together with that huge leviathan brought their broadsides to bear upon the bows of the VICTORY. It was like a hailstorm of bullets passing over our heads on the poop, where we had forty Marines stationed with small arms. It has been stated that Lord Nelson ordered them to lie down at their quarters until wanted, but no such order was given, and no man went down until knocked down; had such orders been given many a life would have been saved, as not a man was hit below the waist. Their steadiness indeed was observed by Nelson, whose eye was everywhere, and who declared he had seen nothing which surpassed it in any of his previous battles. He also made this remark during the battle, "The young Marine is doing well," which I have taken for my motto.

*The Spanish line of battle ship SANTISIMA TRINIDAD.



The painting by J Dighton which hangs in the National Maritime Museum. It depicts the death of Lord Nelson aboard HMS Victory on 21st October 1805. The Admiral is cradled in the arms of Sergeant Secker, whilst sharp shooting marines can be seen on the upper deck and in the rigging.

This I learnt from Sir Thomas Hardy, when returning me his thanks on the quarterdeck for my conduct in the battle. The poop became a slaughterhouse, and soon after the commencement the two senior Lieutenants of Marines, and half the original forty, were placed hors de combat.' Captain Adair then ordered me to bring him up a reinforcement of Marines from the great guns. I need not inform a seaman the difficulty of separating a man from his gun. In the excitement of action the Marines had thrown off their red jackets and appeared in their check shirts and blue trousers. There was no distinguishing Marine from seaman-all were working like horses. I was now upon the middle deck; we were engaging on both sides, every gun was going off. A man should witness a battle in a three-decker from the middle deck, for it beggars all description. It bewilders the senses of sight and hearing. There was the fire from above, the fire from below, besides the fire from the deck I was upon, the guns recoiling with violence reports louder than thunder, the decks heaving and the sides straining. I fancied myself in the infernal regions, where every man appeared a devil. Lips might move, but orders and hearing were out of the question; everything was done by signs.



Admiral Lord Nelson stands on the deck of HMS Victory during the battle. The painting is by W H Overige (?) and entitled 'The Hero of Trafalgar'.

With the assistance of two Sergeants and two Corporals (and in some cases by main force) I succeeded in separating about 25 men from the great guns and with this force I ascended to a purer air. The battle now raged at its greatest height, the REDOUTABLE had fallen on board us on our starboard side, and the soldiers from their tops were picking off our officers and men with deadly aim. We were also engaged with the SANTISIMA TRINIDAD and the BUCENTAURE (though at a greater distance) on our larboard. The reinforcement arrived at a most critical moment. Captain Adair's party was reduced to less than ten men, himself wounded in the forehead by splinters, yet still using his musket with effect. One of his last orders to me was "Rotely, fire away as fast as you can," when a ball struck him on the back of the neck, and he was a corpse in a moment-and at the same time our revered Chief fell, having received his mortal wound from a soldier in the mizzen top of the REDOUTABLE. The Marines became exasperated. I was now in command, and the first order I gave was to clear the mizzen top, when every musket was levelled at that top, and in five minutes not a man was left alive in it. Some Frenchman has vaunted that he shot Nelson and survived the battle, and I have heard that a book has been published so stating, but it must be a romance, as I know the man was shot in five minutes after Nelson fell. About this time I observed a British flag on the opposite side of the REDOUTABLE, which proved to belong to the TEMERAIRE, and shortly after another French ship, the FOUGEUX, fell on board the TEMERAIRE on her starboard side, so that four ships of the line were rubbing

An aquatint of a Private of the Royal Marines c 1807 by I C Stadler



sides in the heat of the fight, with their heads all lying the same way as if moored in harbour. It consequently became a great nicety in directing the fire of the musketry, lest we should shoot our own men over the decks of the REDOUTABLE. I therefore directed the fire of the Marines to the main and fore tops of that devoted ship, and but few of their men escaped. We gained the battle with Nelson's blood.

Gentlemen, this ring is now rendered sacred by the relic it contains, a part of the hero's hair cut off his head by my own hand. On the morning after his death, I went below to view the body, and to procure a lock of his hair as a memento, but Captain Hardy had been before me and had cut off the whole with the exception of a small lock at the back of the neck, which I secured. The hair, with the coat and waistcoat Nelson fell in, was preserved and sent to Lady Hamilton; the breeches and stockings came into my possession, and I have preserved them as valuable relics for upwards of forty years. To preserve the body, a large cask was procured and lashed on its end on the middle deck. The body was brought up by two men from the cockpit. I received it and placed head foremost in the cask. The head of the cask was then replaced and filled with brandy, and a Marine sentinel placed over it by night or day, so that it was impossible for anyone to approach it unseen."

Reprinted from the October 1944 edition of 'THE NAVY' magazine. Refer also to SHEET ANCHOR Vol VIII No 1 (pages 2-4) and No 2 (pages 28-30). And note variance in name spelling.

WESTKAPELLE - November 1944
By Major Wilfrid Sendall RM

In days to come the silver bugles will be blown in the old Headquarter Divisions of the Royal Marines on yet another "memorable date in the history of the Corps." This will be the 1st November, the date of the assault on the Westkappelle Dyke in the island of Walcheren.

It is not lightly that an operation is honoured in company with occasions like Belleisle or Zeebrugge, but, when the histories come to be written, there is no doubt that Westkappelle will be rated as the highest achievement of the Royal Corps since St George's Day, 1918. Like the Zeebrugge raid, it is a classic example of the traditional role of the Corps, an amphibious operation with a naval object-in this instance, the opening of the estuary of the Scheldt and the great port of Antwerp.

Since their defeat in Normandy there is no doubt that the Germans had fought a hard and cunning defensive battle, clinging on desperately to the ports that they knew were vital to the development of Allied strategy. But they made one major blunder. Disorganized by the dash and elan of the 11th Armoured Division, they allowed us to capture Antwerp almost undamaged. To cover up this disaster to their plans, they defended tenaciously the positions that covered the entrance to the Scheldt estuary, in particular the island of Walcheren, where big batteries that could command the sea-road to Antwerp were sited.

The first blow against Walcheren was struck by the RAF Lancaster bombers with their "earthquake" bombs tore two great breaches in the Westkappelle dyke, the biggest dyke in the Netherlands. The North Sea poured in through these gaps in the historic sea wall and flooded almost the whole of the island. But many of the German batteries were sited in the dyke itself, which still stood above the floods. These had to be destroyed.

A three-point attack was planned. One thrust by the 52nd Lowland Division from the east, over the causeway seized by the Canadians; a landing by an Army commando at Flushing followed up by a brigade of the same division; the final blow, to be launched from the sea at Westkappelle, was entrusted to three Royal Marine commandos, supported by a powerful naval bombardment force in which Royal Marines played a leading part at the guns. The Marines were called upon to destroy five or six powerful German batteries in the dyke north and south of Westkappelle, landing actually in the big breach that the RAF had made.

The naval force, consisting of HMS WARSPITE, EREBUS and ROBERTS, a landing craft support squadron of twenty six craft and flotillas of landing craft tank, was commanded by Capt A F Pugsley, DSO RN. The military force under Brigadier B W Leicester, RM consisted of three Royal Marine commandos, two troops of an Allied commando, an assault regiment, Royal Engineers, manning tracked amphibians in which the commandos were landing, a squadron of tanks, two field companies, RE, and a detachment of Pioneers.

Over 50 per cent, of the personnel of the support squadron were Royal Marines, manning the guns of the craft. Of the German defences the most important were W17 a battery of four 220-mm guns to the north near Domberg, W15 a battery of 150-mm guns near Westkappelle, and two batteries of 150-mm.-"13 and W11-to the south of the gap. These big batteries were covered and supported by a series of smaller

positions, the whole constituting an almost continuous fortification along the dyke. The plan allowed for a heavy air bombardment followed by a naval bombardment of these positions, after which the Marines land in the gap, one commando supported by the Allied commando and the tanks to the north, two commandos to the south. These latter had with them artillery forward observation parties, who could call up and direct by radio the fire of field batteries on the mainland near Breskens.

On the morning of 1st November, as the lighthouse tower of Westkappelle rose above the horizon, the RAF liaison officer aboard the headquarter ship had to inform the commanders that, owing to weather conditions, air support could not be relied upon.

As postponement would mean loss of the advantage of a three-point simultaneous attack, the difficult decision was taken to proceed without air support. As it ensued, over 400 sorties were flown by Typhoons of the Tactical Air Force in very difficult conditions. This help was invaluable, but it was not, of course, on anything like the scale originally planned.

As the force closed in towards the gap the sea was calm and visibility good-good enough to make the craft fine targets for the big German guns. WARSPITE, EREBUS and ROBERTS set the ball rolling with their 15-inch guns. When the support squadron was about 10,000 yards off the Germans opened up in reply, but their fire was not accurate and they ceased. When the mass of landing craft was closer in they opened up again, this time with considerable accuracy.

The support squadron, though outranged and outweighed, continued to close in with the greatest resolution, taking the brunt of the enemy fire. At short range they engaged the big batteries north and south of the gap and the pillboxes that supported them. They found the range and held it, despite the concentration of heavy shells upon them, but several were sunk. One craft beached barely fifty yards from a powerful German pillbox covering the gap and shot it out at point-blank range. Many of their shells bounced off the solid con-



Royal Marines landing on beaches from an LCT

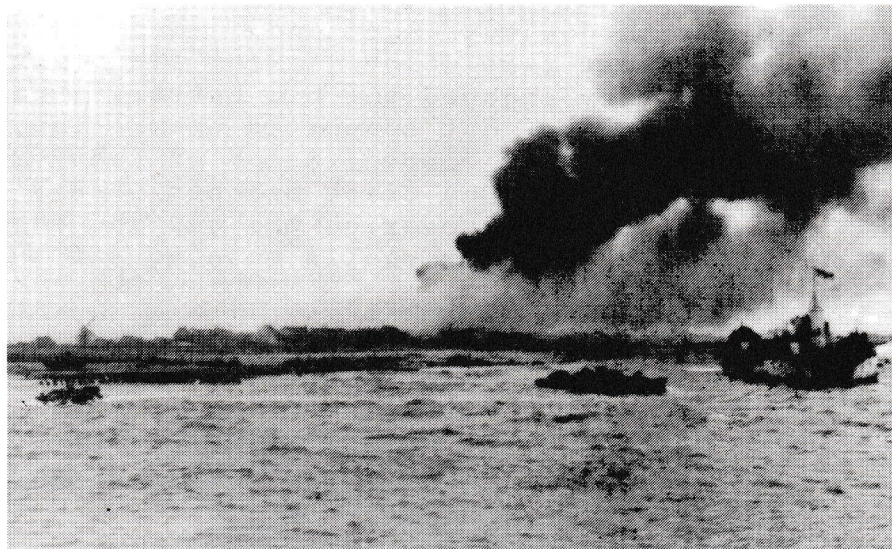
crete, but the Royal Marine gunners stuck to it for twenty minutes, though the craft was hit in several places by shells of various calibres, from 6-inch to 20-mm and the guns' crews were under small-arms fire. Then, with her guns out of action, the craft withdrew, only to sink by the stern as soon as she reached deep water. The companion craft to this one, which went in to engage a similar target, was last seen on the beach in flames.

The courage of the sailors and Marines in these craft saved the day, and the assault troops were able to get ashore with comparatively light casualties. General Eisenhower paid them a high tribute.

"The manner in which the unarmoured support vessels went in," he said, "and slammed it out with heavier guns in reinforced concrete in order to get the soldiers ashore almost unscathed was one of the incidents that would be remembered in British naval history."

Of the twenty-six craft in the support squadron, nine were sunk and eight badly damaged, 372 officers and men of the Royal Navy and Royal Marines being killed or wounded.

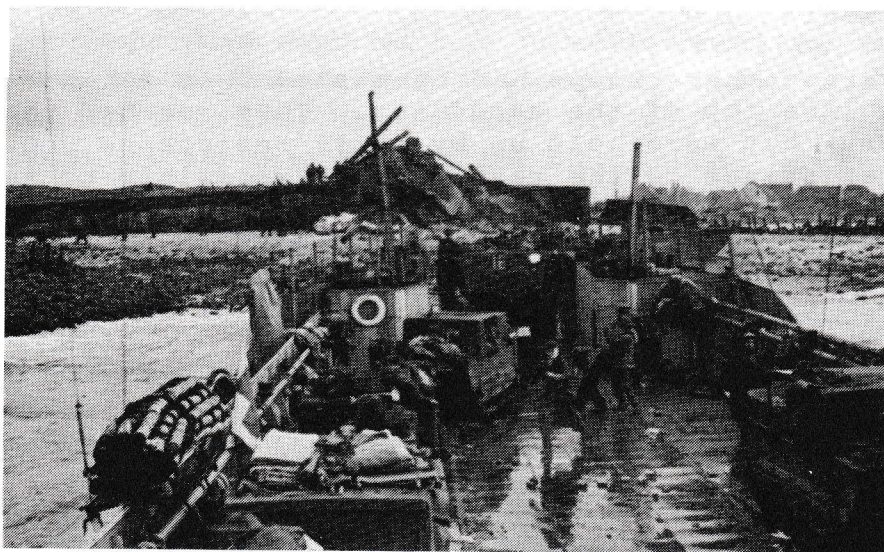
While this gallant but unequal duel was in progress, landing craft tank had been discharging the amphibians of the Royal Marine commandos each side of the gap. Some of the landing craft were hit and several



Assault craft, heavily laden with commandos, moving inshore.

amphibians blown up on mines which defended the edges of the dyke. Only two landing craft could go in on each beach at once so that disembarkation was a slow, nerve-racking process, the enemy gunners having pin-pointed the range to the gap. But once ashore on the sanddunes that were piled high on the solid masonry of the dyke, the Marines made rapid progress.

To the north the commando overcame a pillbox that opposed their landing and swept into the wrecked streets of the village of Westkappelle. Having secured this, they pressed on along the dyke towards the first of the big batteries. Supported by the Allied commando and those tanks which had survived the landing-several were destroyed and



An LCT beached on the north shoulder of the gap

others trapped by the rising tide in the flooded ruins of Westkappelle—they carried the battery. By nightfall they had reached the village of Domburg to the north. Such swift progress was only possible by vigorous leadership and good team work, but many of these Marines, though only youngsters, were veterans of Sicily and Salerno, to say nothing of D Day and the tough fighting that followed in Normandy.

To the south the first objective to fall was a German radar station, already in ruins after heavy bombardment. From here the attackers moved on across a difficult terrain of soft sandhills to battery W11. There was little room to manoeuvre, as the distance between the sea and the deep flood water inland was barely three hundred yards.

Determined to maintain the impetus of their attack, the Marines went straight into an assault on this powerful battery position, protected by minefields and heavily concreted positions. The first troop came under heavy mortar fire and was beaten back with serious casualties. A fresh troop took up the assault, but again they were held up by a hail of accurately placed mortar bombs. A pause was made to organize fire support.

The forward observation parties called up artillery fire from away on the mainland directly on to the German fortifications, and Typhoons of the Tactical Air Force swept in to release shattering salvos of rockets. Then, under cover of smoke, the Marines attacked again. By nightfall the control post and half the battery were in their hands. Under cover of darkness fighting patrols dislodged the enemy from their remaining positions and, at first light, the advance continued to the little village of Zouteland. After a series of small engagements the great dyke which overhangs the village was captured. The Germans in the village surrendered after firing a few shots.

At this point a third Royal Marine commando took over the leadership of the attack. They went forward towards the next big battery-W11. Their way was barred by a road block, a deep anti-tank ditch and a system of dragons' teeth and minefields. Weather forbade air support, but again the artillery from the mainland were called into action. With their aid two troops of Marines managed to cross the ditch, but

they were held up again by the destructive fire of the German mortars, losing many men.

Meanwhile, three other troops had by-passed this defence position by pushing along the top of the sanddunes. They reached the outskirts of the battery, but were held up by stiff resistance. Owing to pockets of resistance in the rear it was impossible to reinforce these advanced elements. All the troop commanders had been wounded and casualties were serious. When darkness fell again, supplies and ammunition were man-handled forward across the sandhills and the Adjutant went up to reorganize the position.

Another troop cleared up the pockets of resistance behind, but the enemy launched a night counter-attack against the forward troops. This was successfully beaten off.

When daylight came a troop from the other commando came in to cover the left flank while another full-scale assault with artillery support was launched. Fighting went on stubbornly until noon and then the Germans began to crack. Once the crack appeared it spread rapidly. German officers were induced to call upon their troops in deep bunker positions to lay down their arms.

After some face-saving talk, the German Commandant himself surrendered handing over his pistol with the words: "If you think I am a coward, shoot me."

The Marine advance continued swiftly until a second gap in the dyke, torn by RAF bombs, was reached. On the other side an Army commando, which had made a gallant landing at Flushing, captured most of that town and then fought its way along the dyke to meet the Marines, was waiting. With this link-up the German grip on the Scheldt estuary was finally broken. Very soon afterwards the minesweepers of the Royal Navy were seen proceeding up the river to sweep the channel to Antwerp.

There remained some mopping up to be done north of Domburg, but the main battle-one of the strangest of the war-was now virtually over. The cost had not been light-379 officers and men killed, wounded or missing. This was not all the price. The whole centre of the fertile Walcheren island was submerged in floods, the great dyke alone standing above the water like the rim of a gigantic saucer. The meaning of this destruction can only be understood by the gallant Dutch people who bear the burden.

But the prize was the greatest port in Western Europe to nourish and sustain the great offensives that General Eisenhower will soon loose upon Germany itself.

In the village of Zouteland, comparatively slightly damaged, Dutch girls in their charming costume-bilowy blue skirts and white linen caps, with knots of orange ribbon in their hair-were out to greet their liberators. The battered main street blossomed with Dutch flags. From the top of the towering dyke a tiny Dutch boy, wearing the biggest possible orange sash, waved his hand to the Marines as they passed by and shouted all the English he knew, which was "Good morning, good morning."

(Reproduced from The Navy - The official organ of the Navy League - Jan 1945)

MAJOR GENERAL SIR JAMES COCKBURN KT KCH

The colour print accompanying this issue of the *Sheet Anchor* is of Major General Sir James Cockburn Kt KCH, the Inspector General Royal Marines from 1831 to 1836. The portrait was painted by A J Dubois Drahonet in 1832 and is reproduced by kind permission of the Army Museum's Ogilby Trust.

In 1831 the office of Inspector General was introduced in place of the Deputy Adjutant General. The post was given to a civilian, who was also Paymaster to the Royal Marines. He was made a Major General in the Army to give him authority over the Colonels of Marines. However the Deputy Adjutant General, Colonel J B Savage, continued to hold on to his post.

General Cockburn had been a Civil Servant, given the honorary rank of Major General, to make it less awkward for him when he carried out his duties inspecting accounts, clothing, etc. The appointment lasted only five years and the abolition of the post was announced from the Royal Marine Office on May 21st, 1836 as follows:

"The Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty having been pleased to abolish the office of Inspector-General of Royal Marines, all reports and communications heretofore made to Major General Sir James Cockburn, Bart, G.C.H., are in future to be addressed to Colonel Sir John B Savage K.C.H. Major General Sir James Cockburn cannot quit the command with which he has so long been honoured without expressing to the Corps of Royal Marines the gratification which he has on all occasions derived from it; and assuring them that he shall ever consider the period of his communication with the Corps as one of the proudest and most satisfactory in his life. He leaves them, from long experience, with the deepest sense of loyalty, discipline, and professional value; and confident of their upholding in all aftertimes the high and distinguished reputation which they have always so deservedly attained, he requests that they will accept the assurance of his everlasting best wishes and regards, and that he shall never cease to feel the liveliest interest in their welfare, prosperity and renown."

J Wilson, A. A. General

It is of particular interest to note that Major General Sir James Cockburn was a brother of Admiral Sir George Cockburn, an 'Admiral of the Red', who was also a Major General of Marines under the old 'Blue Colonelcy System'. Under this system, certain naval officers drew additional pay for the rank of Colonel or General of Marines. Indeed one might speculate that this could account for Sir James' appointment as Inspector-General.

By Major Patrick D A Ennor (RMHS)

THE ILL-FATED DAKAR EXPEDITION

At Scapa there always seemed to be quite a heavy swell even in the anchorage and the accommodation ladders were secured more often than they were lowered. The boats were manned either at the davit head and then lowered, or by rope jumping ladders hanging down the side of the ship. Either of these evolutions performed in a heavy swell was rather alarming to inexperienced men in fighting order, carrying weapons and wearing hobnailed shore service boots. Later in the war during landing craft training quite an elaborate drill was evolved. The armoured decks of the LCAs were covered with hessian matting to provide a foothold and planks were used to span the terrifying abyss between the ship's rail and the gunwales of the boats. None of these aids existed in those days. The time spent at Scapa was of immense value in enabling us to learn boatwork and to practice landings and the securing of a beach perimeter, and we were all confident when orders came to sail.

As soon as we got out to sea there was quite a blow and the ship pitched a good deal. I was quite determined not to succumb to seasickness which I felt would be highly unbecoming to an officer. Fortunately I had no difficulty in maintaining my resolution. Bobbie Cox, an RAMC Officer with us, prescribed plenty of gin and Angostura bitters, and certainly his recipe proved a good one. Some of the men however were very sorry for themselves and spirits were not much heartened by the sight of a corpse floating past, nor the rapid departure of our escorting cruiser, HMS *Fiji*, after she had been hit by a torpedo on our first forenoon out from Scapa.

Leave had been given Commanding Officers to tell their officers the object of the expedition immediately after sailing. We were accordingly gathered together and learned that we were to go first to Freetown and then occupy the French West African port of Dakar; and then secure the French battleship *Richelieu* laying there in harbour. From then on much time was spent studying intelligence reports, and the plans and operation orders were evolved. I remember two pieces of intelligence in which Peter Picton-Phillipps especially delighted. We were likely to be opposed by French Senegalese troops, who reputedly had not entirely shaken off their cannibalistic tendencies, and that lions and tigers from the Dakar Zoo might be let loose at us. I do not know if the horrifying alternatives of being eaten by carnivorous bipeds or quadrupeds were calculated to inspire tremendous military ardour; but I reflected that the liberated animals were just as likely to turn and rend their former keepers as the invaders; and that the French Colonial soldiers might well prove more odoriferously attractive and succulent than we.

Our passage to Freetown passed without further adventures. Tests of Elementary Training and such other activities as were possible continued, but out of regard for the decks, the men were obliged to wear soft shoes or unnailed boots. This was early in the days of the war, when the pride and foibles of the Masters of Merchant ships were not to be entirely disregarded.

The day following our arrival in Freetown our Company landed and marched to Lumley - about five miles away. After our long incarceration in the ship the Company Commander felt that it was necessary for us to do some marching and make some attempt at acclimatisation. In this he was of course right, but his methods were

somewhat drastic. For many of us this was our first experience of the tropics and when we landed at high noon the heat and smell were intense. We had been lectured about the horror of illness contracted in the tropics that I really feared that the virus of some ghastly disease lurked in every inhabitant who approached us. Freetown was not a happy choice as a place of introduction to the British Empire. 18 years later I revisited it and it was little changed except to appear rather dirtier, smellier and more degenerate than before.

In 'fighting order' with ammunition and weapons, which included Bren guns and tripods, mortars and bombs, and that useless incubus the Boys anti-tank rifle, we marched out to Lumley beach where those who wished to bathed. I had a pretty shrewd idea of the dangers of a tropical sun on a wet, unacclimatised European skin and refrained from doing so. Our march back to Freetown was even hotter than the outward journey and the heat, striking up from the tarred roads, attacked bare knees - especially the backs of them - with tremendous force. But despite the heavy loads only one man fell out, and he, carrying a mortar, did not do so until he fell, literally collapsing in his tracks.

I have often been surprised - considering the vast annual expenditure on service material - at the poor quality of clothing provided and its frequent unsuitability. The days of harsh woollen underwear were just passing, but on this tropical expedition our men wore issue socks, above them hose tops which stretched from ankle to knee, above them full length serge puttees, so they had on their legs three thicknesses of wool, all of the coarsest and harshest quality.

Shortly before we sailed the CO was order to detail one Company to come under command 1st Battalion RM, commanded by Lt Col G E Wildman-Lushington, in the *Ettrick*. C Company, prominent as ever, was selected. A certain amount of warship procedure and routine has been introduced into the *Kenya*, but this was nothing compared to what 1st Bn had done in the *Ettrick*. As we came over the side, there was a complete gangway staff, an officer, bugler, corporal of the gangway and messengers. The watch was regularly changed and bugle calls blared over the loudspeakers. It was all very 'pussers' and, I thought, very impressive and efficient. The *Ettrick*, a P & O ship, was a good deal larger than the *Kenya* and, in addition to the 1st Bn, she accommodated the Brigade HQ staff and various attached ancillary units.

We were cordially received on board, but Peter Picton-Phillipps had the Company spirit so strong that he wished us to have a separate table. This, I thought, was carrying it too far and when Evelyn Waugh, Headley and one or two other 1st Bn officers kindly asked me to join them for dinner, I gladly accepted.

While we were in Freetown HMS *Devonshire* arrived and a crowd of her midshipmen descended on us like a cloud of locusts to act as boat officers for the landing craft. Two of them remained with us for months and were very competent at handling the LCAs and LCMs. It was a pity we did not know then what the future held for us and taken the opportunity to learn something about the landing craft from these highly competent young men. Here I met for the first time Bobbie Parks-Smith, Tony Pigot, the Brigade Signals Officer, and Major Bertie Bass who was OCRM of HMS *Devonshire*.

At last we sailed for our rendezvous somewhere off Bathurst. Quite a large proportion of Britain's naval might was included in this expedition and the forces consisted of HMS *Barham* (flagship of Vice Admiral J H D Cunningham), *Resolution*, *Ark Royal*, *Devonshire*, *Cumberland* and *Australia*, along with six destroyers, transports and

store ships. This great armada steamed northward. When dawn broke on D Day the sea was an oily calm. We were all on deck early waiting for the code word that would put one of three alternative plans into action and were thrilled by the arrival of HMS *Sheffield*. She had been delayed and was steaming down from the north on an opposite course from us, and, with her battle ensigns flying, she was a most impressive and inspiring sight.

I will not recapitalise the story of this unfortunate expedition which has already been discussed and described all too frequently. It is enough to say that the boat bearing an envoy and flying a flag of truce and Tricolour, was fired upon; the aircraft flown off from *Ark Royal* was allowed to land and then impounded; a warning shot fired from one of the warships landed in Dakar hospital; and HMS *Resolution* received a hit from a torpedo. The signal to withdraw was made, and as we steamed disconsolately southward, we were subjected to spasmodic bombing. Thus again the question, ever recurrent in history, "What would have happened if....?" remains unanswered.

In very poor spirits we returned to Freetown and rejoined the *Kenya Resolution* limped in and remained in harbour for months. We learned that the Royal Marines Brigade was again to be divided into two Brigades, one which Brig St Clair Morford continued to command consisted of 1st and 5th Battalions sailed for Gibraltar in the *Ettrick* and *Karanja*; the other composed of 2nd and 3rd Battalions moved into Lumley Camp, each battalion leaving one rifle company and elements of its HQ Company in the ships *Kenya* and *Sobieski*. Brig Robin Campbell resumed command of this Brigade and accompanied by his Brigade Major flew out from England.

At that time great importance was attached to the wearing of sun helmets. As the Brigadier and his BM had to fly over neutral territories they had been instructed to wear plain clothes and on arrival the BM discovered that his helmet had not been packed. With laudable intention to conforming to the regulations, he bought a Bombay bowler in the bazaar, and thus equipped reported to his Brigadier. Brig Campbell, who never by any chance wore a helmet himself, returned the salute, and looking at the enormous figure in front of him said "Very nice Jumbo. Now put the hat on the right way round."

The camp at Lumley was not a good one. It was right on the sea shore and had recently been condemned as unfit for native troops. At that time very little was known about anti-malarial prophylactics, and although the anti-malarial discipline of the unit was very good, and we continually swallowed pills, smeared ourselves with evil smelling ointments and draped ourselves in veils, the casualty rate was very high. Just before Christmas, when we had our spell in the ship, we were in strength exactly half the establishment.

Although we were several months in Freetown, day succeeded day with such unending monotony that very few incidents stand out in memory. Our exercises, which were frequent, almost always took the same form. A landing from the ships followed by an assault on Wilberforce Hill, gallantly defended against us by 4 Bn Essex Regiment. The one good thing was that, as we were always obliged to operate over the same terrain, there being none other available, it was not very difficult. There were of course pleasant interludes. Dining in *Resolution* with Tony Bamford, Sunday evening cinematograph shows in the *Edinburgh Castle*, an excellent dance given by the 3rd Battalion in the *Sobieski*, convivial evenings and sing-songs in the ships and in camp,

debates and quiz competitions designed to keep the men amused and interested. Even a service lecture could be enlivened by playing noughts and crosses for half a crown.

For me the highlight of this period was news of the birth of our son which reached me on 19th December aboard *Kenya*. I went into the saloon and invited everyone to join me in 'wetting the baby's head'. I remember Reggie Page's kind words in drinking my son's health when he added 'and may he ride a National winner'. Someone else enquired if he had made his entry into this world with a bottle of gin in one hand and a hunting whip in the other.

One duty we had to perform for the first time was the censoring of letters. I understand that in some regiments, elaborate arrangements were made to ensure that the men's letters were not censored by their own Company officers. It was not so with us. A suggestion that confidence would be abused or that letters would be used as vehicles for the improper ventilation of grievances would have been repugnant to us and in utter conflict with the relationship which existed between officers and men. Doubtless the high quality of our men and the examples and precepts of the Senior NCOs were largely responsible, but I hardly ever had to cut anything out, nor did the letters reveal a character and make up much different from what we had already assessed.

Eventually it transpired that we in Freetown, and the other RM Battalion in Gibraltar, had been held in readiness for various expeditions which never developed. No uprisings occurred in countries we were itching to suppress, no violations of neutrality was contemplated by the enemy in any country where they could be forestalled by us. So we were to return to England and in a very few days *Kenya* and *Sobieski*, escorted by HMS *Dunedin* sailed for home. I little thought as we looked back on Freetown, that it would be my fate to return there eighteen years later, and in very different circumstances.

As the ships had been 'sitting on the milk tins' for many months, they were very foul with 'wind, tide and slope' to help us make only about 8 knots. It was therefore decided we should go into dry dock in Gibraltar. After Freetown almost anywhere in the world would have been agreeable, but the prospect of Gibraltar with its charms and pleasures, and splendid association was thrilling indeed - especially to one who was as historically and romantically minded as I. Gibraltar, the 'grim fortress', symbol of Britain's power and greatness, so proud a battle honour as to be the only one borne by Royal Marines on their Colours and appointments; here indeed was a shrine of glory and tradition. Gibraltar did afford delights to all. The casemates and fortifications of the Rock, Alameida, Algeciras Bay, the Barbary apes and a distant view of the hill from which the Queen of Spain had once vowed in vain that she would not move until the English had been driven from the Rock, were there for military student and historian; good hotels and restaurants and well-stocked shops for the sybarites and those with thoughts of curious presents for 'sweethearts and wives', even expeditions to La Linea and forbidden Spain for those sufficiently interested and enterprising.

To Be Continued

RECRUITING WAS DIFFERENT IN THOSE DAYS

WOODEN MARINES

Extract from a Journal dated 10th December 1831

"A Corporal and a Drummer of the Royal Marines, on the recruiting service at Henley, applied to the Magistrates to punish a man they had the day before enlisted, but, upon inspection, turned out to have a wooden leg. It appeared the Corporal slipped the enlisting shilling into his hand upon the usual expression of "free, able and willing", and which was soon converted into three pots of fourpenny, and as soon consumed by the recruit and his officers, and upon the word of command to march, the want of a limb so necessary to perform this part of the duty became obvious. The Magistrates recommended them in future to drill the recruits before parting with His Majesty's money. But the Drummer insisted that this man ought to be punished to deter others, and to prevent not only His Majesty's officers, but His Majesty himself, as represented by them, from being laughed at. The Magistrates, not apprehending the latter, dismissed the case."

THE BIRMINGHAM APPROACH

In 1771, one Sergeant Galbet was sent recruiting to Birmingham for the Royal Marines. This is the advertisement which notified his activities:

July 22, 1771 - "He That Works Hard Is Sure To Be Poor"

"After Six Days Hard Labour Comes Sunday - You Rest"

And no sooner peeps Monday but you are quite shy of Cash. Therefore to make Life easy, and fill your Pockets with Money, Sergeant Galbet will learn any young man a Profession (without fee or reward) by which the Learner will be sure to earn a Guinea and a Crown the very first hour. He will also introduce you to His Majesty's First Division of Marines, which is always quartered at Chatham, only thirty miles from London, to which place Pleasure Boats carry passengers for sixpence each. When you arrive at Chatham, you are immediately provided with Cloaths, free Quarters in the Public-House, where you will be sure to meet with Merry Fellows, a kind Landlady, and a rousing Fire: do nothing but on a fine day dance to the softest Music, feed on Dainties, drink the best Liquors and Play at 'Why won't you' with the prettiest Girls, saying 'Chatham for Ever' and

"God Save The King"

NB: He teaches no Militia men or Apprentice.

OUTSIZE IN RECRUITS - 1927

A recruit, Charles Wood from Somerset, has given the first Quartermaster cause for much brain fag and insomnia. He takes 13s in boots. Every effort was made to fit him, and all existing stocks of boots and shoes were tried. The Master Shoemaker eventually fited him by using the amount a leather required for two pairs to make one. The next problem is, what about Gym Shoes? At present he is wearing boots for P.R.T., but the staff are experimenting with soled and heeled 'Pussers Socks'.

MARINE RECRUITING -IRISH STYLE

Extract from a Thesis on Irish Jails

Nevertheless the government did not forbid the practice for as a source of recruitment it was too attractive to be disowned. A letter from a marine lieutenant to the secretary of war described the usual method then employed:

'Being in this kingdom on recruiting service for the marine corps, hearing that a number of men were confined in Armagh gaol where I found many of the prisoners inclined to enlist in the marine corps if leave could be obtained. Have taken the liberty of enclosing a list of those who gave me their names, if permission is granted many more will go.

The advantages to be derived by those poor deluded men being permitted to enlist in the marine corps are obvious.

(1) Relieve the kingdom of an expenditure of provisions from whence there is no return.

(2) They will be embarked immediately

(3) Being employed fighting for king and country of course as full members of society. Whereas if permitted to enlist in any other corps they may remain sometime in the country and will not be remedied. If allowed to go with me I propose marching them direct to the tender at Dublin.''

The officers' list comprised 15 names; three were due to be hanged the following week; six had been respited until further orders; one was under rule of transportation; and five were to be confined for three years.

¹ W Buchan to W Elliot, 16 June 1796, P.R.O.I., Cal. O.P. carton 508/17 doc. 20. In June 1799 the prisoners in Dundalk gaol petitioned the government to remove two of their number who had received pardon on enlisting, and who had since remained in the gaol terrorizing the other prisoners.

Submitted by James O McDonald MBE, MSc, FSCA, JP

HMS ROBERTSON - The Only Photograph ?

A search of Corps Museum and the Imperial War Museum photographic libraries produced no illustrations for the HMS ROBERTSON article in the last issue so only maps were used. Since then however Colonel W S North has kindly loaned a group photograph of the officers during his period as 'Captain' of this RN Establishment, which is reproduced here. (Major S Hamilton RM was the 'Commander').



Back Row: Lts. C. Rouse, R. E. Cordwell, J. F. Newling, N. C. Hyde, J. C. Landon, L. Needham, Capts. R. Bird, J. E. Scott.
Third Row: Lts. W. R. Hayward, M. D. Stear, G. C. Perkins, J. H. Crookes, A. A. J. Foster, Capt. F. E. Hurrall, Lt. A. Punchard, Capt. R. S. Fisher, Lt. N. J. Jeffery.
Second Row: Capt. K. Strong, Lts. D. Neville, J. Storer, Wt. Sch. Mstr. Fitzgeorge, S/Lt. (E) A. L. Lincoln, 3/O C. H. Chandler, S/Lt. W. Mitchell, Lt. W. C. Brown, Capt. A. W. Kydd, Lt. G. C. Stewart, Capt. A. S. Hasler.
Front Row: Surg. Lt. J. D. D. Boswell, Capt. B. J. Shaw, Lt. W. H. Giles, Capt. A. J. Howard, 2/O L. S. Rapp, Major S. Hamilton, Lt.-Col. W. S. North, Major M. M. Johnson, Lt. (E) E. B. Wallis, 2/O F. A. Tinsley, Surg. Lt. (D) A. E. Gee, Lt. (E) G. A. Green.

At the presentation of the ships white ensign on 11 August 1946 at St Clements Church in Sandwich the ensign was carried by Lieut Stacey RM (not on the photograph) escorted by two RM Sergeants and two Petty Officers; it was then handed over to Lt Col W S North who presented the ensign to the Rev A R Ferguson (former chaplain to HMS ROBERTSON who became vicar of this and St Mary's churches which were both used by men from the camp). The Mayor (Alderman Burch) and Mayoress were in attendance with Captains B J Shaw and A Punchard RM, and S/Lt(S) Thompson RNVR.

Lt McLellan RM who was mentioned in the Press report as the officer in charge of the Jungle Training Course (referred to in the main article) is not in this group photograph either.



WANTED

Pensioners, Royal Marine Artillery

FOR SERVICE IN

BRITISH COLUMBIA

UNDER THE CANADIAN GOVERNMENT.

Pensioners volunteering for service as above must have been discharged with character not inferior to good, must be unmarried, not above 45 years of age, in good health, not less than 5ft. 6 ins. in height, and 34 ins. round the chest.

They will be required to pass a medical examination in England; those selected will be conveyed to Canada free of expense and on arrival there, enlisted for a period of 3 years.

The Canadian Government do not undertake to provide men with free passages back to England at the termination of their engagement as it is expected they will become permanent settlers in the Dominion.

The pensions of men who are accepted for this service will be paid in Canada.

Pay, etc., will be as follows:—

PAY.

Staff Sergeants	- - - - -	Dol. 1.00 per day.
Sergeants	- - - - -	0.80 "
Corporals	- - - - -	0.70 "
Bombardiers	- - - - -	0.50 "
Buglers [under 18 years of age. 30c.]		0.40 "
Gunners	- - - - -	0.40 "

IN ADDITION

FREE RATIONS.

1 lb. bread, 1 lb. meat, 1 lb. potatoes, 2 ozs. cheese, 1 oz. pot barley, oz. coffee, $\frac{1}{2}$ oz. tea, 2 ozs. sugar, $\frac{1}{2}$ oz. salt, $\frac{1}{2}$ oz. pepper; also fuel, light, barrack accommodation, and medical attendance.

Good Conduct pay for Bombardiers and Gunners at rate of 2 cents per day for first year's service, 3 cents per day for second, and 4 cents per day for third, to be paid at termination of engagement; and on re-engagement for three years, 5, 6, and 7 cents per day for each successive year.

FREE KIT ON JOINING.

1 Cloth Tunic.	1 Pair Cloth Trousers.
1 Serge "	1 " Serge "
1 Forage Cap.	1 " Boots.
1 Winter "	1 " Mitts.
	1 Muffler.

And thereafter a similar issue annually, winter cap, mitts, and muffler *excepted*, with badges, &c., according to rank.

An annual allowance, after first year's service, of three dollars will be granted to each soldier to enable him to keep up his winter kit, including boots.

ALSO ISSUE OF

REGIMENTAL NECESSARIES.

FREE ON JOINING.

To be kept in serviceable order at the soldier's expense during his whole period of service, viz.:—

2 Grey Shirts.	1 Hold-all.	1 Button Stick.
1 Cotton Shirt.	1 Fork and Knife.	1 Sponge.
2 Knitted Shirts.	1 Spoon.	2 Pairs Socks.
1 Cloth Brush.	1 Razor and Case.	2 Pairs Drawers.
1 Button Brush.	1 Comb.	1 Pair Braces.
1 Pair Shoe Brushes.	2 Towels.	1 Box Blacking.
1 Shaving Brush.		

Apply, with Certificates of service, to

Colonel Commandant,

Eastney Barracks,

PORTSMOUTH.

THE MEMOIRS OF SERGEANT HARRY WRIGHT DSM, MSM

Zeebrugge and After

The latest Special Publication, produced by the Royal Marines Historical Society, is of considerable Royal Marines significance. Sgt Harry Wright was a volunteer for the 4th Battalion and he led 10 Platoon of Plymouth Company ashore on the Zeebrugge Mole after his platoon commander had been killed. Because *Vindictive's* siren had been put out of action, the order to retire was not passed to his group and the ship sailed without them. One officer, two SNCOs, 1 JNCO and 10 marines were captured by the Germans.

During his eight months in captivity Sgt Wright kept extensive shorthand notes which he subsequently transcribed in longhand in three exercise books. These are among the RM Museum's prize original documents. After a fascinating account of a SNCO's view of the training and landing for the Zeebrugge raid, Wright was moved six times, finishing up in the notorious Brandenburg Camp near Berlin. He was a educated man, particularly observant and has a fine turn of phrase. These memoirs fully illustrate the plight of British prisoners of war in the latter days of World War One, when German morale was at its lowest and food, even for themselves, was in desperately short supply. For much of the time the prisoners existed on two bowls of soup a day and one slice of black bread. Red Cross food parcels and letters from home were scarce.

Amongst Harry Wright's recollections were those of prison visits by Belgian nuns, thoughts of escapes, numerous interrogations, railway journeys between camps, sickness in the camps and even witnessing a large German military parade after the war had ended. His style makes excellent reading, and though humour is not one of his strong points, there was little to laugh about in those grim days. His efforts to keep up his Royal Marines discipline and bearing are most noteworthy.

This is a larger than usual Special Publication at 80 pages and includes one map and a dozen photographs, but at £3 (+ 50p p & p) offers a fascinating insight into a previously unrecorded part of Royal Marines history. These are obtainable from Major Jeff Beadle (address inside front cover).

The full list of Special Publications published by the Society:

- | | |
|------|---|
| SP1 | <i>'Hail and Farewell' - Royal Marines and the Portsmouth area</i> |
| SP2 | <i>Extracts from 'Royal Marines Records' Pt 1 1755-1792</i> |
| SP3 | <i>The Royal Marines and the Dockyards 1755-1949</i> |
| SP4 | <i>Extracts from 'Royal Marines Records' Pt 2 1793-1836</i> |
| SP5 | <i>Extracts from 'Royal Marines Records' Pt 3 1837-1914</i> |
| SP6 | <i>The Ghost of a General and the RM Officers of 1914</i> |
| SP7 | <i>One Time Marine - A Bootneck's Tale</i> |
| SP8 | <i>41 (Independent) Commando RM- Korea 1950-52</i> |
| SP9 | <i>Royal Marines in East Devon (Lympstone & Dalditch Camps)</i> |
| SP10 | <i>Expedition to Siberia - 1919</i> |
| SP11 | <i>Marines of the First Fleet (Australian Bicentennial)</i> |

Many of these publications are still available and may be obtained from Major J C Beadle MBE, MC

