

**The story of a man who served pre, during, and post WW2 as a Naval
Telegraphist**

An intimate story of a man who served his country for twenty four years in good
times and bad.

Dennis Robert Williams' Autobiography

Born 3rd June 1915 died 7th October 2008.

Royal Navy Service Number P/JX 135604

(as written by him and amended by
son Robin)



Dennis Robert Williams - autobiography - born in a Dorchester Army Billet on the 3rd of June 1915 an elder brother to Eric and Eileen. He was the son of Robert David Williams, a Dockyard employee who served in the First World War as an Army Signaller, a Private with the 4th Dorset Regiment. Robert David Williams fought at the Battle of the Somme in both of the two big battles with the Dorset Regiment – on his return to UK he had difficulty coping with his wartime experiences relying on alcohol for support. He was a very good footballer and played for Weymouth St Paul's whilst working in the Dockyard as a Diver's Signaller, where at one stage, he was involved in the search for the sunken Submarine M1. Always in the Pub he would drink some 11 pints a night and during days off he would consume 10 pints at lunch time, come home and sleep it off ready to return to the Pub for his 11 evening pints. He was never aggressive when under the influence and in the main treated the family well. He was renown for his high spirits in the Pub often Tap Dancing on the Bar. He was also popular as he would often bring items to the Pub for distribution, items which he had acquired through some diving activity of the day. Obviously most of his pay went on drink and the family of two boys and a girl suffered from poor nourishment which also did not help with their mother's invalidity. Two Pennies worth of Butchers Scragg Ends were often the basis of the week's food. His Grandfather was a professional soldier who spent most of his life campaigning in India. His Mother Daisy Ethel (nee Cousins) was born in the village of Puddletown, a daughter of a 'Respected Shepherd' and at the time of Dad's birth she was a Torpedo Works Labourer.

Most of his early childhood was spent with an Aunt, on a farm near Beaminster, Dorset, his mother being an invalid. His restricted schooling at Holy Trinity School was completed at the age of 14 years. During the latter days at school he was able to take up a hobby of constructing wireless receiving sets, initially experimenting with crystal sets, then constructing valve receivers. In both cases it was necessary to wind ones own coils and build individual cases. Crystal sets were made using Coal as the Crystal and were assembled on a daily basis so his father could listen to the News then disassembled each evening as they could not afford the Licence Fee. Eileen (his sister) tells of a story that Dad at the age of 12 won a school draw and as a consequence had a trip in an aircraft of Sir Alan Cobham National Air Day Display - later known as Cobham's Flying Circus however Dad never relayed this story to me.

An odd co-incidence occurred on the date of Dad's death (7th Oct 2008) as the Dorset Echo (Local Weymouth Evening Newspaper) printed some photos of bygone days of Holy Trinity School with Dad as a boy in 1925/26 on page 13, extreme left third row of top photo in Scout uniform - so he must have been a Scout - something I did not know - but a most strange event - his photo appearing in the paper on the day he died - the newspaper did not and could not have known of his death on that day.

Starting work at 14 at a Piano Shop (which is now the site of Mark's and Spencer's in St Mary's Street, Weymouth) primarily to learn to be a Piano Tuner which never happened, he was more of an errand boy however his flare for communications meant he was to become involved in the repair of communication equipment of the day - a side line in the shop.

His father had promised him a Carpentry Apprenticeship but once the financial side had been worked out his father decided he could not afford it (it would have meant him giving up some of his Beer). Eventually after a visit to a Royal Naval (RN) wireless transmitting station at Portland Bill he decided to apply to join the Navy and attempt to qualify as a Wireless Telegraphist.

After a series of tests and a severe medical examination at a Southampton RN Recruiting Office his entry into the Royal Navy was accepted. (Of 25 candidates he was the only one accepted because of his grasp of mathematics which he was able to prove). Considered very lucky by the Recruiting Officer as there was no shortage of Naval recruits at that time due to the country's high unemployment.

After reporting to Southampton Recruitment Office to enlist a further medical examination was carried out prior to travelling to Gosport with 4 other recruits. He joined H.M.S. St.Vincent, at Gosport, on the 28th April 1931 as a Boy 2nd Class. Initially trained as a Boy Seaman then as a Boy Signaller, he was finally accepted to qualify as a Boy Telegraphist. This meant extending a stay at St. Vincent for a further 16 months. Comprehensive schooling on radio theory and training as a Wireless Technical Telegraphist followed. Surprisingly he never learnt to touch type however he was very fast on a Typewriter this being the main means of recording a message whilst in the RN.

Sporting activities were encouraged at St Vincent thus enabling him to enjoy football, rugby, hockey and athletics during his longer stay. He recalls that on some occasions he would play Hockey first and once the game was finished he would then play in a Football match. He was Captain of the Divisional Rugby team. He enjoyed the Training at St Vincent immensely which was unusual as most recruits did not. Discipline in Training ship's was very strict an example of which was that the Birch was administered if Trainees were caught Smoking. Trainees were not allowed to smoke till they went to sea. (Dad referred to the Birch however the Birch was replaced by the Cane in 1906 as the punishment tool so I guess Dad was never on the receiving end of either).

During one of his first leave from St Vincent he was 'fortunate in meeting a lovely Children's Nurse' - Joan Genevieve Louvain Down - on Weymouth Promenade beginning a long courtship as they were both aged 16. They married when they were 22 resulting in 3 children. Much of their courting at that time was conducted in Nothe Gardens in Weymouth.

On the 1st of December 1932 his first draft arrived and he was off to join H.M.S.Royal Sovereign at Portsmouth Dockyard - an enormous battleship fitted with 15inch guns.The boys were stuffed down in the bowels of the ship, everything was hot, the atmosphere very humid and on the whole the constant noise made things very frightening. The bathroom was an ex Coal Bunker as although the ship was oil powered it was originally designed as a coal burner.

He settled down gradually as the ship sailed for Malta and a two-year Commission in the Mediterranean Sea. Eventually he became a man at the age of 17 and a half, his rating an Ordinary Telegraphist. Nothing really exciting happened in the first year, although he came out of the Bridge Wireless Office on one occasion and was confronted by the ship's Captain. A frightening experience for a young sailor, so he froze (with fear) but the Captain was very kind and talked him through his ordeal and then invited him to the Bridge so as to witness the ship coming alongside in harbour. This highlighted to Dad just what responsibility the Captain of a warship had which resulted in much respect for not only the Captain of the Royal Sovereign but also all warship Captains. Eventually his training was considered complete and he became a full member of the ships wireless staff.

Thus life began as a full-blown wireless operator enjoying the sense of responsibility of being a single representative of the ship amongst operators of the Mediterranean Fleet. During the

4 hour shifts the necessary concentration was so intense that time passed exceptionally quickly. On the Royal Sovereign the wireless equipment was antiquated. The receivers needed absolute concentration as their frequency wandered continuously. (Dad and I did visit HMS Collingwood Radar/Radio Museum in 2006 and saw just the very set up of a similar ships Communication Office). Again he was able to enjoy sports i.e. football, hockey, marathon running and sailing but not much cricket. So the days passed, on/off watch, trips ashore in France, Spain, Greece, Cyprus, Palestine, Egypt, North Africa and of course Malta, the Home Base. This was the general way of life until the 9th of June 1934 when the commission ended and he was drafted back the Royal Naval Barracks at Portsmouth.

Footnotes

Submarine

MI

On 12th November 1925 *MI* sailed from Plymouth to take part in an exercise. Several vessels reported seeing the submarine on the surface during the course of the proceedings and *MI* exchanged messages with the minesweeper *Newark* at 0730. At 0737 *MI* dived and never resurfaced. What happened to the submarine remained a mystery for several days until the Captain of the Swedish collier *Vidar* made a report of his journey from Cardiff to Stockholm. On entering the English Channel British warships were seen carrying out exercises. The *Vidar* was continuing on her way when at 0745 a heavy blow rocked her. The Captain put this down to bombs being used in the exercise as his ship was still perfectly watertight, and proceeded on his way without communicating with the warships. Only on reaching the Kiel Canal on 16th November did he read about the on-going search for the submarine. Three days later it was possible for divers to inspect the hull of the *Vidar* where it was found the stem had been bent and several rivets were missing, indicating a collision with an underwater object. Traces of paint on the colliers stem were later found to be identical to that of *MI*. The search for *MI* continued for a month until on 2nd December the Admiralty announced that the search was to be discontinued as nothing had been found.

HMS Royal Sovereign was built by Parsons at Portsmouth and launched 29th May 1915 and commissioned in May 1916, she joined the 1st Battle Squadron of the Grand Fleet but missed the Battle of Jutland. In 1919 she joined the Atlantic Fleet. During World War Two, Royal Sovereign was in the Home Fleet during 1939 and Atlantic convoy duty in 1940-1941. Due to her poor condition she spent September 1942 till September 1943 in refit in the United States, after her refit she spent just one month in the Indian Ocean and then returned home where she went into reserve, but was loaned to the USSR (becoming the Archangels). She sailed for Murmansk on Convoy duty on the 17th August 1944 and returned to Rosita in 1949 and was scrapped at Inverkeithing. The Gun Bearings were used for the Jodrell Bank Telescopes and the 15inch Guns are mounted outside the War Museum in London.

The next few months, whilst in Portsmouth Barracks, meant employment on various small jobs in the Portsmouth area. The most important being a temporary draft to a Reserve Fleet ship H.M.S. Effingham to use her wireless equipment to take over the duties of the local Shore Wireless Station, "rather hectic but an enjoyable experience".

Footnote

HMS Effingham - [Hawkins class heavy cruiser](#) Ordered: [December 1915](#) Builder: Portsmouth Dockyard, Laid down: [6 April 1917](#) Launched: [8 June 1921](#), Commissioned: [2 July 1925](#) Fate: Wrecked off [Bodø, Norway, May 18, 1940](#).

The 30th of April 1935 saw the beginning of his next commission a draft to H.M.S. Exmouth. This ship was the leader of the 5th Destroyer Flotilla, attached to the Home Fleet. Unfortunately little Home Fleet activities were experienced as the ship was employed in the Mediterranean for a considerable time. Firstly, after quick visit to the port of Haifa in Palestine, they began a blockade of Merchant Ships that were supplying Italian forces that had invaded Ethiopia. In the wireless office for most of the time they were trying to jam radio frequencies of Italian ships that were calling for assistance, a most unusual job. Then off to the Spanish coast for an extended time rescuing refugee's from both the fighting sides in the Spanish civil war. Rumours of excessive cruelty were rife.

During the latter part of this war he spent most of the time at Bilbao, a port on the northwest coast of Spain, transferring to differing ships of the flotilla providing duties as a wireless guard ship. The Exmouth was an extremely happy ship and the esprit de corps in the mess was remarkable. The Exmouth is the reason why Dad dislikes Pheasant as the Wardroom Pantry was below his Mess on board and the Officers used to hang their Pheasants there and the smell was unbearable (Pheasant once killed are hung up for a week to 10 days (sometimes longer) so as to increase the flavour before they are cooked). The commission ended on the 25th of April 1937 so back to the Royal Naval Barracks at Portsmouth once again.

Footnote

HMS Exmouth H 02 was built in Portsmouth Dockyard U.K. by Fairfield Shipbuilding & Engineering Co. (Govan, Scotland). Order laid down 16 May 1933 and Launched 7 Feb 1934. Commissioned 3 Oct 1934 and Lost 21 Jan, 1940. HMS Exmouth (Capt. *Richard Stoddart* Benson, DSO, RN) was torpedoed on 21 January 1940 by the German submarine U22 (Jenisch) off Tarbett Ness in the Moray Firth. She was hit at 0444 hrs, sinking with no survivors in position 58°18'N, 02°25'W, east-south-east of Wick, Scotland. The wreck lies in 40 meter of water.

Whilst on leave he paid another visit to “my lovely nursemaid” who was now a Ladies Maid in the employment of Dr Marie Slopes in her residence at Micklehain near Dorking. During a ramble on Box hill- a local beauty spot –“I popped the question and we became engaged”.

He then began a period of duties on various ships based at Portsmouth. Firstly on H.M.S. Wild Swan which was employed as an aircraft safety ship in the English Channel, whilst serving on this ship his Marriage Banns were read at St Ann's Church in Portsmouth Dockyard, and on the 21st August 1937 Joan Genevieve Louvain Down and Dennis Robert Williams were married in St Mary's Church at Weymouth. Of note, Joan's father was an Army Medical Orderly during the 1st world war and was an ardent member and indeed

secretary of the "Old Contemptible" - an association of British Army units who were the first to arrive in France in 1914.

Initially Mum and Dad's accommodation was a two room bed-sit in Grafton Road, Portsmouth prior to moving to Lealand Road, Drayton in 1938 then to 7 Central Road West, Drayton in 1939 which eventually became 25, Central Road remaining the family home up until his death. Initially 25 was rented but then purchased in January 1958 for the grand sum of £900 with a deposit of £115 with an overall cost of £1150 which included all legal fees, taxes and house cost. Mortgage was with the Hampshire Building Society which was paid off in November 1975. Mum's sister lived at 19, Central Road West (which became 37, Central Road) and it was she who managed to secure number 25 (then number 7) for the Williams's.

The crew of the Wild Swan eventually transferred to H.M.S. Windsor, which carried, on the same duties. Promotion to Acting Leading Telegraphist arrived on the 3rd of November 1937, and another ship change to H.M.S. Sardonyx. This ship was ancient, personal hygiene washing and bathing was from your own private bucket! During this period he became involved in experiments with equipment that eventually became the basis for a High Frequency Direction Finder. The resultant equipment was successfully used against German and Italian submarines and was considered a major factor in winning the Battle of the Atlantic.

Footnotes

HMS Wild Swan Destroyer D62 - Modified W-Class built by Swan Hunter at Wallsend on Tyne Launched 17th May 1918. Completed on 14th November 1919 she was bombed and sunk by German Aircraft in the Bay of Biscay 18th June 1942.

HMS Windsor Destroyer D42 - W-Class Destroyer built by Scott's at Greenock. The ship was laid down in April 1917 and launched on 21st June 1918. On completion on 28th August 1918 she joined the Fleet and was present at the surrender of the German High Seas Fleet in November 1918. This ship served in the 6th Flotilla, Atlantic Fleet in 1921 and was part of the Portsmouth Local Flotilla in 1928. Sold for scrap in March 1947. Displacement: 1,100 tons Speed: 34kts Complement: 125. Armament: Two 4 inch guns. One 3 inch anti-aircraft gun, two 6 pdr anti-aircraft guns, three 2 pdr anti-aircraft guns, two 20mm anti-aircraft guns and three 21 inch torpedo tubes.

HMS SARDONYX S Class Destroyer D26. Built by Alexander Stephen & Sons Cowan, Glasgow. Length: 276 feet Breadth: 26 feet Draught: 8 feet. Steam 36 Knots. The ship was laid down 25th March 1918 and launched on 27th May 1919. Build was completed on 12th July 1919 and she served with the Fleet until later was placed in Reserve. Brought forward for service in 1939. Scraped Preston 1947.

In October 1938 his daughter Denise arrived. The midwife remarked how bonny she was and the name stuck throughout the family. Another change of ship to H.M.S. Arrow. He was confirmed as a Leading Telegraphist and then promptly redrafted to an unusual job on the Isle of Wight. A large Gunboat was being built to accommodate the Admiral in command of the British Gunboats on the Yangtze River in North China. His duty was to supervise the fitting out of the Wireless Offices. On completion she was named H.M.S. Scorpion and sailed to China with a civilian crew, to be taken over by the R.N on arrival at

Hong Kong. Fortunately my presence was not required and I returned to the Naval Barracks in Portsmouth, the eventual crew ended up as Japanese prisoners of war for most of the 2nd World War.

Footnotes

HMS Arrow H42 an A Class Destroyer Built by Vickers Armstrong at barrow and launched 22nd August 1929. Initially serving in the Home Waters, before being transferred to Gibraltar and the Mediterranean, and was damaged beyond repair in [Algiers](#) harbour in 1944 when an [ammunition ship](#) exploded. The hulk was finally being scrapped at Taranto Italy May 1949.

HMS SCORPION (J.S. White & Co., Ltd., Dec. 20, 1937). Displacement: 700 tons. Complement 93. Dimensions: 200 (pp.), 208 3/4 x 34 2/3 x 5 1/2 feet. Guns: 2-4 inch, 1-3.7 inch Howitzer, 2-3 pdr. 10 smaller. Machinery was Parsons geared turbines. H.P. 4,500 = 17 kits. Fitted for service as Flagship on Yangtze. HMS Scorpion reached Shanghai in 1937 and replaced HMS Bee as flagship in 1938. She was never able to proceed to Hankow because of a Chinese blockade on the Yangtze consisting of sunken vessels and mines. She sailed for Singapore in December of 1940 and was sunk by Japanese bombs a little over a year later. Scorpion was sunk somewhere in the vicinity of Muntok (Banka Island) near Singapore on February 12th or 13th 1942. A report from the Mata Hari which picked up five of the Scorpion's crew who had been swimming in the water for over five hours. The Mata Hari surrendered to the Japanese later that night at the mouth of the Moesi River which flows into Palembang. The actual specifics of the Scorpion's demise appear to be that she was damaged by aircraft on February 9, 1942 and later sunk by a Japanese destroyer at the Banka Straits three to four days later.

On the 22nd of March 1939 Dad received a draft chit to join H.M.S. Dainty. A destroyer attached to the British China Fleet. He was devastated! This was to be his first break from his own family, an experience he shall never forget it took a very long time before he could recover from homesickness. A long trip on a P&O Liner SS Rajputana eventually found him in Hong Kong Naval Base. (SS Rajputana, 16,568 Tons, became an Armed Merchant Cruiser - HMS Rajputana - which was torpedoed and sunk 13th April 1941 off Iceland). The eastern horrible smells, the constant spitting, the strange noises, the clatter of Chinese Clogs made his feelings for the Royal Navy very very low. "Oh! How depressing life was at this stage". The constant worry for his family who were living on a very limited income was almost unbearable.

Eventually he joined the ship and the companionship onboard and plenty of work enabled him to settle down a little. The wireless office was extremely busy, at one stage it was a case for the single operator to man three communication channels at the same time, one on each earpiece and the other on loudspeaker. "Impossible at times but overall it was coped with". Duties as pirate patrol, wireless guard ship at Shanghai, and a spectacular regatta at Wei Hai Wei in North China, helped the first six months of this commission to pass very quickly.

The duty at Shanghai was extremely interesting the ship acted as a communication link for the gunboats stationed at various towns on the 4000-mile long river known as the Yangtze (now Chang Jiang). The gunboat's equipment consisted of antique spark transmitters, which had limited range, necessitating all messages being relayed between the ships up and down the river. It was amusing to listen to the operator's constant banter. The Diplomatic Service

also used the Gunboat's wireless facility. Another radio duty was to maintain contact with the Army Headquarters Peking (Beijing). No emergencies arose during their period of duty. It was noticeable at the time how the British Fleet seemed to have complete freedom in Chinese territory as if China was a part of the British Empire. This situation remained until the Japanese invaded China, and then restrictions were imposed as they moved southwards. Minor incidents occurred between British sailors and the Japanese military, one rumoured incident where a Japanese flag was lowered and watered, threatened to become a major National Incident.

On the 1st of June 1939 he was promoted to acting Petty Officer. It was about this time that the authorities gave permission for the marriage allowance to be paid to men under the age of 26 years. Suddenly his income was trebled! Money worries about the care of my family were therefore very much lessened. During September the ship was docked in Hong Kong and it is of interest that the method of docking used was to pull the destroyer up a slipway using a huge wire rope - a most unusual method for a fairly large ship. Mid September saw the rather expected declaration of the Second World War with Germany.

The ship's first duty was to round up the special Naval Parties protecting Diplomats in Consulates at ports along the China coast. Eventually the whole flotilla was recalled for service in the Mediterranean for convoy duties, arriving at Malta on the 1st of November 1939. One particular escort duty was to take 12 motor gunboats from Malta to Marseilles so that they could return to England via the French canal system. This entailed refuelling them at Tunis and Ajaccio in Corsica. Unfortunately, during the second leg, they met a force nine gale which severely damaged a number of boats and they had to be destroyed. The seas were so rough that radio communication with Malta was impossible due to the waves earthing the Transmitter's Aerials. His son Robin was born in November 1939. After some minor escort duties he was then drafted to H.M.S. St Angelo for duty at Malta's wireless station.

This did not last very long as a call for a reduction in staff resulted in a draft chit home as he was the only Petty Officer (P.O.) who did not have his family in Malta. Father travelled by troopship to Marseille then by train to Cherbourg for a Ferry over to UK. Travelling thorough France as the Germans were advancing was pretty dicey but Father was amazed to see the French Army with Horse Drawn Guns travelling to the front and at that time he realised they did not stand a chance. Several British Soldiers were also on the Train/Ferry journey and as the Ferry was travelling as fast as possible in rough waters so as to evade U-Boats, which was a constant threat in the Channel, many were violently sea-sick.

After 10 days leave with his family, who had been evacuated to a cottage near Exeter, Newton St Cyres Crediton, Devon. Father said this was a bit of a disaster as my Mother plus my sister and self were there as well as my Grandmother, plus Auntie Peg with three kids and Aunt Molly with two - it was bedlam and the women were always bickering.

He did make another trip to see the family either at Exeter or Sherboure (where the family moved to as the German Bombers visiting Plymouth flew over Exeter and were apt to drop loose Bombs). On this visit he left the ship in Plymouth (the Atherstone) with special leave granted by the Captain however on returning to Plymouth the ship had sailed but Dad, being a Communicator, knew the ship was to head for Falmouth so he made his way there and met up with ship. The Captain was highly delighted congratulating Dad on his initiative.

He received another draft chit this time to an unknown vessel only identified by a job number. He was not at all happy having heard a buzz that it was a submarine. It was not until his arrival in Birkenhead did he discover it was a new type of escort destroyer, HMS Atherstone. L05. After the ship was accepted by the RN the ship sailed to Scapa Flow for a period of "Working Up" i.e. efficiency training. Their first operational duty was to proceed to Norway to escort a number of damaged ships back to the U.K. the result of persistent aerial attacks whilst in Norwegian waters. He was accommodated in the After Mess being a Petty Officer.

First Atlantic convoy trip was disastrous. In fact dangerous, it proved that this type of ship was not able to master the dangers of the Atlantic Ocean weather. The ship had been fitted with some type of stabilisation which almost caused the ship to capsize in the rough Atlantic seas scaring all aboard, including the Captain, the ship therefore returned to harbour where a quantity of pig iron was added to the ships bilges in order to make it more stable. Consequently the ship's operations were confined to the English Channel which meant escorting convoys along the South coast. (Usually 3 or 4 small coal burning freighters as Churchill insisted these convoys took place so as to show the Germans that the English Channel was just that).

Again the first trip was disastrous as the ship was badly damaged. Hit by three German dive-bombers resulting in the loss of eleven members of the crew. It was frightening, the wireless office door was blown out and the only escape route was through the Boiler Room. (a miraculous escape as Dad and another Telegraphist had to go back for their Life Jackets which saved them from the blast that blew out the office door). Almost sinking the ship was towed back to Chatham Dockyard for repairs and decommissioning. He remained with the ship with a skeleton crew for the docking period, which stretched for a period of three months. Chatham was in the German flight path for the bombing of London and it was not until they invaded Russia did we have a complete nights sleep. In fact the ships guns joined the anti-aircraft barrage. Dockyard workers stood by when the ship's Guns were engaged on enemy aircraft as the firing caused the ship to vibrate shaking loose the blocks supporting the ship in the Dry Dock. The Dockyard Workers were on hand constantly replacing these supports during any firings.

Eventually a new crew arrived and although he was prepared to leave the ship his relief was despatched back to Portsmouth and he had to remain, "I was not very pleased at the time". (He was not happy about this bearing in mind previous experiences aboard and despite trying to tell the new crew just what to expect they would not listen, told him to stop dripping! but on the first convoy they soon realised just what he meant!) Another working up period at Scapa Flow then back to hazardous duties along the English Channel and weekly trips through the Dover Straits, to face constant air attacks, shelling from the French coast, possible E Boat attacks and the presence of German mines, made life more than interesting.

Other duties carried out were, escorting fast mine layers to the French coast, investigating shipping movements off the Channel Islands (which resulted in the sinking of two German ships as they sailed out from St Hillier in Jersey) rather a murderous affair, acting as bait to ambush enemy aircraft and escorting the Commando force to the French port of St.Nazaire 27th March 1942.

This force consisted of an ex-American destroyer (USS Buchanan DD131 leased to UK under the Bases for Destroyer Agreement) HMS Campbeltown, a high-speed Motor Torpedo

Boat, a Motor Gunboat and sixteen Motor Launches together with two escorting destroyers – Atherstone and Tynedale. The force sailed from Falmouth (flying the German flag - Cambeletown had been converted to look like a German Destroyer) and on passage attacked a U-boat as well as interning a number of French Fishermen for security reasons (sinking their Trawlers which they did not seem to object - the crew came back to the UK with the Atherstone after the raid was completed. The idea of interning the fishermen was to ensure that the Task Force movements were not reported).

The Campbeltown was full of explosives and was intended to ram the Dry Dock in St Nazaire harbour thus depriving the Germans of a major docking facility on Europe's Western Seaboard. The Torpedo Boat was to torpedo the bomb proof U-boat Pens, the Motor Launches were to evacuate the survivors. The Campbeltown also carried a number of Commandos who were to destroy dock pumping gear etc. Unfortunately the planned air attack, to provide a diversion, could not take place owing to low clouds. In fact the RAF did circle overhead which only alerted the Germans that something was up. The operation was a complete success but the number of casualties was extremely high. The two escorting Destroyers picked up survivors outside the harbour and the damaged boats were destroyed.

The return journey began with an encounter with four German destroyers, shots were fired but with help of smoke made by both sides, contact was lost. At this stage of the events the Navigating Officer gave the wrong position for the POTel (Dad) to report only to correct it when the signal had gone – Dad swore at the Navigating Officer over the Voice Pipe and consequently received a minor ticking off by the Captain Lt Commander (Ginge) Jenks. (At a later time Jenks discussed with the Yeoman and Dad about forming the St Nazaire Society as the raid was so memorable however Jenks took umbrage when the Society was formed and the Escorts were only able to become Associated Members.)

Aircraft attack was continuous throughout the journey. On one occasion a Junker 88 was attempting to attack Atherstone but a RAF Beau fighter engaged it eventually both planes collided for which there was no survivors (apart from Atherstone). Reason for the collision remains a mystery – either the Beau fighter Cannons jammed and the Pilot decided to ram the Junker or another theory is that the Cannons on the Beau fighter were so powerful that when in use they caused the aircraft to slow but on cease firing the aircraft would speed up and this probably caused the collision with the Junker. (This scene was witness by Dad as he was on the upper deck at the time).

The Ships Company were delighted to see the Beau fighter as to them the RAF was always late but were just in time on this occasion. The Atherstone did alter course to look for survivors of the aircraft but were ordered back in line by the Tynedale (the Groups Senior Ship). The escort was reinforced with two more destroyers – HMS Brocklesby and Cleveland - the German ships were not seen again. Tactical manoeuvres also enabled the force to escape from a large air attack that was unable to find it. (When clouds came over ships altered course but then reverted to original - wrong - course when clouds cleared thus confusing the Germans).

Dad also said that they carried many of the wounded back to the UK and the doctor (MO) on board at that time had a terrible task as he did his best to tend them but many died on him and he was distraught - my contact with Christine Hamilton was an attempt to establish whether this was her father (Dr Ted Holman) but it appears that whilst he has crossed the bar he was a most modest man and did not talk much of his war years however they are looking for his

RN records but have since heard that it was probably not him. (He did serve on the Atherstone but maybe the first commission with Dad). It was more likely a Surgeon-Lieutenant Johnstone Dickie, RNVR who was awarded the DSC for his part in the Raid. Dad knew the 'Doc' well and was quite friendly with him:

(a) because the MO was also the Crypto Officer - who would work with the Comms man – Dad

and

(b) because the Sick Bay was opposite the Wireless Office.

All wounded from MGB 314 were transferred to Atherstone together with Crew and Commando Complement of ML 156.

At Plymouth numerous ambulances with some cheering greeted them as the casualties were disembarked. During this period Dad was twice Mentioned in Despatches and awarded the Croix de Guerre with Vermilion Star - the actual event which resulted in the award was never revealed to me by Dad..

(Croix de Guerre: Eligibility - Military Personnel Only, often bestowed to members of allied countries - Awarded for individuals who distinguish themselves by acts of heroism involving combat with enemy forces).

The Captain of the Atherstone was unhappy about the rear ship's mast which hampered the rear gun coverage and Dad re-designed the Ships aerial system which was the main reason for the rear mast and Dad's design meant that the mast could be removed. The design was forwarded to the Admiralty for approval but it was turned down – however the Captain did authorise the modification on the Atherstone – a modification which eventually accepted by the Admiralty and became the standard for all Hunt Class destroyers.

Footnotes

This story was submitted to the People's War site by CSV/BBC Radio Nottingham on behalf of Henry Scott with his permission.

I was an ordinary signalman in 1942 at the time of the St Nazaire raid. In March 1942 I was sent down to Devonport to pick up the destroyer HMS Atherstone, which was to be part of the fleet assigned the task of blowing up the dock gates at St.Nazaire. St Nazaire was an important port for the Germans because it was the only dock available on the Atlantic seaboard, which was able to accommodate the Tirpitz and also U Boat pens were located there from where U-Boats would attack our shipping in the North Atlantic. St Nazaire lies at the mouth of the river Loire and in March 1942 the two destroyers Atherstone, which I was to sail on, and Tynedale joined the rest of the fleet at Falmouth. As far as I can remember there was a motor gun boat, a number of motor launches full up with troops and a ship called a block ship which was a converted American destroyer. Most American destroyers have 4 funnels and we noticed once coming into Devonport a ship alongside a jetty being converted and it had originally 4 funnels but they took two off to make it look like a German destroyer. We later found out that this altered destroyer was to become the block ship, which would be

used to ram the dock gates at St Nazaire and later explode. Before we set sail there were a terrific number of signals going from one ship to another and a sense of excitement and also a certain amount of nervous anticipation of just how successful the raid would turn out to be and how many of us would be coming back in one piece.

Eventually on a Sunday afternoon at about 2pm we set sail from Falmouth, crossed the channel and headed into the Bay of Biscay towards St Nazaire. Now in the Bay of Biscay we saw a fishing boat and we sent a boarding party to interrogate the sailors. I remember seeing a fisherman coming out of the hold of the boat with a brand new suit on a hanger and I thought whatever happens he's not going to lose that new suit! So we took all the crew off and sank it. Sinking it was necessary because we could not be sure that whoever was on the little boat would not have got in touch with the Germans and given our position away. We also saw a conning tower of a U-Boat so dropped depth charges where we thought the submarine was but we could not locate it. So we sailed on and reached the mouth of the Loire and all the motor gunboats/launches went on up the mouth of the Loire while the destroyers waited outside the entrance to the Loire, standing by ready to pick up any survivors. At one point during our wait I was on the bridge of the Atherstone when I heard a whistling sound. Suddenly German shells from destroyers went flying over our heads and dropped a little aft but fortunately missing the Atherstone! Our captain, Lieutenant Commander Jenks laid a smoke screen, which involved pouring oil on the fires down below, which created thick black smoke which concealed our position.

After a few hours, once we had picked up survivors from the raid we left the mouth of the river Loire and headed for home. I remember being on the bridge and looking back as we sailed away and seeing a solitary motor launch, empty fortunately, with a German plane hovering over it. Suddenly the Germans dropped a bomb smack on it and blew it to smithereens. We returned to England with the Tynedale, both of us carrying wounded men. There was one memorable incident on the journey home in the Bay of Biscay when German planes came across and one bomb fell incredibly near on our port side. Then a Heinkel plane came down our port side and the plane turned in to drop a torpedo. The Yeoman said to me 'right Scottie, man the port Lewis'. So I went over and opened up with tracer bullets, which went dead on the plane. 'Good shooting Scottie!' the Yeoman said to me and the plane turned away. It probably wasn't my shooting which turned him off us of course, rather the larger guns, the Pom Poms and Oerlikons which were all having a go at him alongside my Lewis gun. All the same I was proud of my effort and surprised at how accurate I was! We then returned to England as quickly as possible to get the wounded to a hospital.

Footnote

H. M. S. A T H E R S T O N E (L 0 5)

Type I HUNT-Class Escort Destroyer ordered from Cammell Laird at Birkenhead and the Lead ship of the Class. She was ordered on 21st March 1939 under the 1939 Build Programme and laid down on 8th June that year. Launched on 12th December 1939 she was the second RN warship to carry the Name, previously used by a minesweeper in 1916. Build was completed on 23rd March 1940 and when inclined her stability was found to be unsatisfactory. The major changes made included landing one of the three 4in Twin mountings (X position aft), addition of permanent ballast and reduction of top weight. Subsequent ships were modified to correct this design weakness. In March 1942 this ship was adopted by the civil community of Long Eaton, Derbyshire after a successful WARSHIP

WEEK National Savings campaign. In October 1945 she paid-off and was reduced to Reserve status. After eight years laid-up in Reserve Fleet at Portsmouth she was transferred to the Reserve Fleet Division at Penarth. The ship was placed on the Disposal List in 1957 and sold to BISCO in November that year for demolition by Smith and Houston at Port Glasgow. She arrived in tow at the breakers yard in the Clyde on 25th November 1957.

On the 4th of June 1942 the ship was decommissioned and he was drafted to the Signal School-HMS Mercury and from there it was on to a training camp at Ayr in Scotland (an ex Butlins Holiday Camp) for instructional purposes, HMS Scotia "Oh what a welcomed relief!" So began the first preparations for the eventual invasion of France - the training of young Telegraphists. It was thought that a large number of Telegraphists would be lost on the D Day Landings and as such a large training programme was instigated so as to train 3000. As it turned out only 30 Telegraphists were lost during the Landings and as a consequence there was many a Tel going spare and they were allocated to various other tasks. Father's promotion to Chief Petty Officer was received on the 21st February 1944 together with a new category Wireless Instructor First Class.

This period ended in September 1944 and it was off to the Far East to join a Flotilla Leader-HMS Rotherham. After the long trip to the Ceylon naval base I was suddenly 'Shanghaied' to join HMS Haitan, a coal-burning vessel used originally as a small passenger ship along the China Coast. Thus began the most bizarre experiences of my whole naval career.

Firstly the ship had to be fitted out with enough wireless equipment to enable it to act as a landing ship headquarters. Power to be supplied from large generators fitted on the upper deck. The first class dining room and stairway was converted into an Operations Room. After embarking an Army Section and a flight of RAF personnel, the ship sailed from Colombo, proceeding at six knots for a landing exercise at Yuhu beaches, near Bombay. Finally, after successfully getting all the equipment to work, the ship sailed for Colombo. Although, before the anchor was weighed the native crew mutinied, but with the help of signalmen and telegraphists and a hosepipe to quell the angry natives, the ship eventually sailed. It appeared the crew was not enamoured with the ship's future operations.

On arrival at Colombo British sailors and stokers replaced the crew (these RN personnel were spare bodies in Colombo some straight out of Detention Quarters). The native crew were taken away, each escorted by two Royal Marines, to an unknown fate. Then off to Burma at a steady four knots and an armament provided by the Army's rifles, to carry out the duties of a Landing Ship Headquarters and to control troop landings on the Burmese coast. (Dad took on the role of Beach Master - with a badge of office a Walking Stick used with aplomb!) After a number of successful operations, a modern Landing Ship Headquarters - HMS Bulolo, the Communications HQ Ship from Gold Beach of the Normandy landings - took over our duties.

One memory father has on the Haitan that the mess caterer always included three prunes for all mess members breakfast every day. Most of the sea time was spent playing bridge with other senior rates.

Before sailing from Burma I was employed on the fitting out and manning of a small landing craft to act as a wireless link for the troops landing at Rangoon. This proved to be quite an adventure. On entering the mouth of the river Irrawaddy the escorting landing craft was mined and we ended up beached at Elephant Point and in contact with Ghurkhas. (In actually

fact the Naval Party was in Rangoon before the Army and the Naval Lieutenant of the group wanted to hoist the White Ensign but decided against it as he did not want to upset the Army when they arrived - however when they did arrive they were not too happy anyway). When they did arrive a tall ginger headed fiery Colonel commanding the paratroops was enraged, claiming that friendly forces had bombed them. Luckily only one man was injured but none the less an unwelcome experience.

The required wireless operation was very successful. It was during this operation we received the news of VE day, wonderful! Our war worries for the family was over. From there I was shipped back to Bombay to join the combined operation signal school at Bandra, about 20 miles by rail from Bombay (now Mumbai). Quite a pleasant place except for the presence of numerous vultures that fed on the bodies of Indian Peasants placed on a tower locally. The school was called HMS Braganza 3. All the wireless equipment was removed from HMS Haitan and fitted into a number of trucks. A new unit was formed to be known as a Mobile Support Control Unit who's duty was to relieve the Landing Control Ships on D plus 3, i.e. three days after the initial landings.

Thus I became Chief of Naval Party 2441, immaculately dressed in Jungle green. And fully trained in the use of the pistol, rifle, Sten gun and bush knife. My St Vincent training turned out very useful indeed! With the help of a Royal Marine group we learnt how to "Live off the land" and to survive in the jungle. Actually being such a change of environment it became very enjoyable.

Then it was back to the war, the unit together with its 20 or so trucks were sent to an extremely large Army Camp to join a very big invasion force, After the motorised units were made watertight we boarded a "Liberty" merchant ship and sailed with a large convoy eastwards, It was very spartan onboard. We were packed into holds at various levels, no sleeping accommodations other than using mats. We shared a level with a section of Sikh troops, which gave us a lot of interest, but they brought their meat ration with them - live goat! Our meals were very good indeed served from wooden boxes marked Pacific Rations.

Approaching Malaya we received the wonderful news that our war was now over, but the planned landing operations would still be carried out. Warnings were given that sections of Japanese might not know of the cessation of hostilities so care was still necessary.

This unit was landed in small assault craft just as the monsoon rain arrived. We were disgorged in rather deep water and being clothed and armed up most of the young lads found it very difficult to reach firm ground. After spending the night on the beach huddled up under monsoon capes we forced marched inland a few miles and settled in a small ship building complex to await the arrival of the trucks. The whole communications outfit was set up successfully except for the aerial masts erection party who, whilst hoisting the second mast ran into a Hornet's nest, they've never moved so fast in all their lives. During the brief stay here we met numerous snakes including a Python, a large group of orange O-rang-ou-tangs and shared a river with Crocodiles - until the first sighting!

Eventually the whole unit had to move to Singapore Island to take over Sembawang Airport which had been occupied by the Japanese equivalent to the Fleet Air Arm, they insisted on turning over to a Royal Naval Unit. British and Australian prisoners were subsequently released. They were all in a very poor shape and the medical authorities quickly moved in to remove them for hospitalisation.

The Mobile Support Unit (NP2441) was now disbanded and so we rejoined the Navy.

My next move was to the Headquarters in Singapore itself and using the equipment from the trucks (ex Haitan) set up communication links with the Admiralty and Headquarters in Ceylon. This had limited success so off we went to the north of the Island and took over a Japanese transmitting station, quite a massive affair hidden in the midst of a rubber tree plantation. It proved a complete success. Initially we had a crew of 12 Japanese, 6 Chinese, 4 Malay drivers, 4 Dhoby women, 2 Italians, a section of Sikhs as sentries and 14 British Naval wireless men. Life became very complicated, in addition to my regulating and technical duties, I became medical advisor! - Aspirins were my saver. Was quite happy until the women started bringing their children to me, then I became very squeamish, they were all suffering from the lack of their rice diet, so they had to be despatched to the doctor at the Naval Base. From then on I had very good liaison with a proper doctor! And began to enjoy my work once again!

A new wireless transmitting station was built at the Naval Base and we became redundant, so on the 10th of July 1946 my duties in the Far East ended and a draft chit home was eagerly accepted. During the period I was with the Naval Party my daughter Marjorie was born in June 1945. After the usual Foreign Service leave I joined H.M.S. Mercury - the Naval Signal School at Leydene near Petersfield for instructional duties.

Footnote

HAITAN (1935 - 50) Douglas Steamship Company. Built by F Schichau, Danzig for Russian Volunteer Fleet Assoc., and Vladivostok for Vladivostok/Shanghai trade as OREL. 9/14 armed and commissioned as auxiliary cruiser (training). 1917 put in to Hong Kong after political differences among crew. 1/20 escaped from Vladivostok - 2/20 arrived at Calcutta via Shanghai and Hong Kong with refugees and 300 naval cadets. Temporary employment in Saigon rice trade to pay off debts and buy coal to reach Mediterranean - 8/20 arrived at Dubrovnik. 10/20 decommissioned and returned to RVFA (White Admin., Paris). 8/21 sold to New York, Newfoundland and Halifax S.S. Co. Ltd, (C.T. Bowring and Co. Ltd mgrs), Liverpool. Renamed SILVIA. Refitted on Tyne and converted to oil fuel. 1922 entered New York/St Johns trade. 1926 assisted disabled KENTUCKY. 5/12/26 damaged in explosion of tanker AGWISUN in New York. Late 1928 sold to Bermuda & West Indies S.S. Co. Ltd (Furness Lines), Bermuda (same service). 9/34 sold to Williamson & Co., Hong Kong for 8,000 pounds with delivery at New York. 1/35 transferred to DSSC and refitted at Hong Kong. 5/35 renamed HAITAN. 2/6/39 strafed by Japanese aircraft at Foochow. 25/7/39 damaged by mine off coast of Fukien. 1940 chartered to British India S.N. Co. Ltd for service in Bay of Bengal. 8/11/41 commissioned by R.N. for use as depot ship at Rangoon - later Trincomalee. 6/46 returned to DSSC. 23/12/50 Hong Kong registry closed on sale to local breakers.

On the 20th of April 1946 it was off again, this time to H.M.S. Duke of York the Flagship of the Home Fleet. At first this duty was hard work but became very interesting. A long cruise to the West Indies was great, Barbados, Trinidad, Antigua and Jamaica were visited and the crew was made extremely welcome, in fact the hospitality was overwhelming. Then final visits to Bermuda and Norfolk in Virginia USA completed a pleasant and an excellent cruise.

Footnote

HMS Duke of York was built at Clydebank and launched on the 28th January 1940, she served most of World War Two in the Home Fleet, (1940 to 1945) serving of the Murmansk Convoys and also took part in the sinking of the Scharnhorst (German Battlecruiser) on the 26th December 1943, in August 1945 she was transferred to the Pacific to operate against the Japanese. She entered the reserve fleet in 1949 and was scrapped at Faslane, Scotland on the 18th February 1958

The ship decommissioned on the 5th May 1949, so back to HMS Mercury for a stint of 2 years instructional duties, teaching both men and women the art of direction finding and aircraft communications. This duty enabled me to be home every night - great! It could not last, on the 18th of July 1951 my final ship draft arrived, this time to HMS Glasgow, Lord Mountbatten's flagship of the Mediterranean Fleet. My wife and family eventually joined me in Malta and we took up residence in a flat at Pieta. The children were educated at the naval schools and thoroughly enjoyed their stay. Unfortunately the Suez Canal crisis meant that the ship spent a considerable time in the eastern end of the Mediterranean, so my visits to Malta were limited.

In April 1954 the Family returned home in a troopship (HMT Cheshire) and enjoyed the experience immensely. Three weeks later HMS Glasgow returned to Portsmouth and on the 19th of May was decommissioned hence my return to H.M.S. Mercury.

Footnote

HMS Glasgow (C21) a Southampton Class Cruiser, was built by Scotts, Greenock, Scotland. Laid Down 16 April 1935. Launched 20 June 1936. Completed 9 September 1937. Paid off November 1956. Broken up by Hughes Bolckow, Blyth, 1958. HMS Glasgow, one of eight six-inch cruisers built in response to the Japanese cruisers Mogami and Mikuma, which had twelve six-inch guns fitted as part of their armament, was ordered on December 17th 1934. On 20th June 1936 she was launched and first commissioned on 8th September 1937. Acting in her pre-war role she, together with a sister ship HMS Southampton, escorted the newly crowned King George VI and Queen Elizabeth, aboard the Empress of Australia, across the Atlantic where the Royal Couple toured Canada and America. At the outbreak of World War Two, HMS Glasgow was serving with the Home Fleet and continued to do so until she joined the 3rd Cruiser Squadron in the Mediterranean in 1940. In 1941 her theatre of operations moved to the Indian Ocean before she returned to home waters at the end of 1942. In 1943 the Cruiser patrolled colder waters in the Arctic, undertaking convoy escort duties to Russia, before seeking out blockade runners, destroying enemy warships and bombarding the coast of Normandy prior to the Invasion of Europe in 1944. Post-war HMS Glasgow fulfilled the role of flagship on a number of occasions and took part in courtesy visits in many parts of the world before she was mothballed at the end of 1956 and finally broken up in 1958. HMS Glasgow was considered by those who sailed aboard her to be a happy ship. Motto: Memores Tuorum

After a few instructional duties and a couple of vocational training courses at HMS Mercury - Leydene, near Petersfield, Hampshire - I finally left the Navy on the 2nd of June 1955.

The resultant rewards of my 24 years of naval service may be summarised as follows: -

- (a) A pension, small but very acceptable.
- (b) A terminal grant of £257.
- (c) The following medal awards in order from the left: The 1939-1945 Star, the Atlantic Star, the Burma Star, the War Medal with Oak Leaf [Mentioned in Dispatches], the Long Service & Good Conduct Medal, the Croix de Guerre with Vermilion Star: in addition two Mention in Dispatches Certificates.
- (d) Character assessment as being "Very Good" with superior efficiency with the following special recommendation: - An excellent Chief Petty Officer Telegraphist in every way. He is very reliable, competent, loyal and hard working. His power of command is good and he is possessed of initiative and intelligence. He has been a very good and successful instructor in Technical subjects. The last sentence was the key to my eventual entry into the world of Science i.e. The Royal Naval Scientific Service.



C **ivvy** **Street**
On leaving the RN Dad applied first for a job at GEC but was offered a Fluorescent Light maintenance mans job as he had not served an apprenticeship but held a RN Electrical vocational training certificate. He did not take it but secured a job as an Inspector at the Bush TV Factory at Farlington Marshes now the site of Sainburys and Homebase. This job involved night work and this was a job he disliked and only lasted 3 months before he took the Civil Service Examination and gained a post as a Clerical Officer in Portsmouth RN Dockyard.

Whilst in the Dockyard he met an old RN acquaintance from Admiralty Surface Weapons Establishment (ASWE) on Portsdown Hill a consequence of which led him to gaining a position in the Royal Naval Scientific Service at ASWE as an Assistant Scientific Officer employed on the Planning of Ships Communication Systems. He was eventually promoted to a Scientific Officer retiring in 1981 at the age of 66 (six years beyond normal civil service retirement age). During his time at ASWE he was required to travel to various Naval Dockyards including Portsmouth and Rosyth. One major project was the planning of the Communication Systems on HMS Fearless and HMS Intrepid.

Dad would visit the New Inn Pub in Drayton usually with his chum Stan a biscuit company rep however after Stan's death his visits to the Pub petered out.

Throughout Robin Paul's boarding school stay, Boundary Oak and Seaford College, both Mum and Dad were on hand to collect and deliver Robin from and to school not only to take to and from the airport for end of term holidays but also to collect for the week-end breaks. Week end breaks which Robin really enjoyed, often accompanied by his school chum Karim, their stay was an experience that both Mum and Dad enjoyed enormously.

After the RN Dad was not too interested in travelling however after some time he took up holidaying abroad with Mother picking up last minute offers visiting Dubrovnik, in the then Yugoslavia, Spain, Majorca, Malta, Zante and of course Gibraltar where Bonny was based whilst David was in the RAF. The Zante holiday was in fact the last holiday he took with Mother and a holiday which they both enjoyed very much Dad stating it was the best holiday they have ever had. He and Mother did enjoy many UK car journeys - he planned each route meticulously then keeping a written record of each trip visiting many a tourist spot as well as participating in the odd ramble. Camping was also enjoyed by both Mum and Dad.

Mum and Dad were keen dog lovers and owned three dogs (at least) Rags, Prince and Suzy - the latter of which was the favourite. Tit-e-Wee - I remember as a child which I tormented endlessly so he did much to avoid me and I believe that was the only family cat.

After Mothers death Dad concentrated on his garden and when he was unable to cope fully he employed a Gardener - Suzy - although he still took an active interest in the garden as well as sometimes doing too much. He took up computing some 15 years ago in early 1990s and paid a young girl to help him get started. Sharon visited him once every three weeks so as to share a bottle of wine and talk computers as well as football. Both Sharon and Dad were firm Pompey Supporters although Dad's interest was limited to watching the TV and following form through the local and daily newspapers. With Sky TV Sharon, her mate and parents sometimes visited so as to watch particular football matches as indeed did Derrick and Janice Jurd, his next door neighbours, who often came in to watch matches with him too. The redevelopment/relocation of Fratton Park (Portsmouth football ground) was of great interest to him and potential sites were visited but to date (Oct 2008) there is no progress on its move.

TV was also an important pastime for him - not only watching sport (of all kinds) but also Western (Cowboy) films which offered him a lot of enjoyment not to mention the Soaps - Emmerdale and Coronation Street.

Always a keen Churchgoer he and mother attended the Methodist Church in Drayton and Dad continued to attend after Mum's death gaining many a friend from the congregation.

Shortly after his 87th Birthday he suffered a number of Heart Attacks which resulted in a several stays in Hospital (Queen Alexandra) however he returned home and was cared for at night by one of his lady friends - Annabel - (actually her name is Ann but she was referred to Annabel so as not to confuse her with Dad's daughter Ann). My sister Bonny cared for Dad during the day. Annabel's daughter Lorraine arrived every Thursday morning to do the house cleaning. Another lady arrived every three weeks so as to cut his hair (and tidying up after). He had to attend several medical Tests/Checks after his Heart Attacks however he did not take up the option for a By-Pass Operation - which in the long term was the correct decision given that Margaret Thatcher's husband Dennis had a Heart Attack about the same time as Dad and went for the By-Pass after which he was OK for two months, very ill for the next four months then he died - Dad made it to 93years.

In 2000 he took a great interest in the development and building of the Spinnaker Tower at the Gun Wharf in Portsmouth visiting as much as he was able to 'monitor' progress. When I visited him every other Tuesday we usually travelled to the Gun Wharf to see the Tower as well as to partake of a Big Whooper in Burger King - although he never had a Burger prior to 2000. Obviously the weather would predict whether we went to the Gun Wharf as it can get very cold and blowy there. So we would go to Mother Kellys in Portchester for Fish and Chips or at Wyledale Garden Centre in Havant not only for a meal but also to purchase yet more plants for his garden. Sometimes we would lunch in The Manor House Pub in Court Lane. We did take a trip to the top of the Spinnaker Tower on the first day it opened which was quite a view and well worth the Fee - in fact we went again on another occasion.

The Gun Wharf visits are not so popular during the Winter months or School Holidays - too cold, too busy. Trips to Portsmouth usually involves a trip along Southsea Front prior to returning to 25 Central Road for a cup of Tea and a chat where much of the additional information in this document comes from.

In June 2008 another week in hospital at Queen Alexandra with water on the lungs which was drained after many a test on his heart to advise him it was abnormal - a fact well known since 1987. An embarrassing incident occurred for Dad when he left hospital for he dressed to leave behind a screen and when he showed himself fully dressed he was applauded by the ward, as led by the nurses, as he was one the smartest dressed persons ever to enter or leave the ward.

September 2008 another few days in Queen Alexandra hospital admitted early on Sunday 28th after experiencing severe chest pains but released a few days later. On a visit to Portsmouth at beginning of October it was noticed that Dad was not looking so good and it turned out that he was once again admitted to hospital through being breathless on the 5th October 2008.

I received a call at 0330hours on the 7th October 2008 and rushed to the QA hospital. On arrival at 0530 hours it was noticed that Dad was in a pretty poor state. Both my sisters were already with him and had been since 0350hours. We discussed that whether the girls should go home to wash and change then return. Unfortunately shortly after they left at 0700 hours Dad died. I was with him at the time of death which he fought literally right to the end and just before he died there was an undignified episode where he wanted to get out of the bed tearing all the medical attachments from his body - he was naked and so thin presenting an alarming specitcal taking three nurses to get him back into bed - ten minutes later he took his last breath.

As Asbestosis was detected a Post Mortum was conducted and as a cause of death was not identified an inquest is to be held in approx six months time although funeral can go ahead.

Funeral was set for 1315 hours on Friday 17th October 2008 with a wake at the Manor House Pub - Court Lane.

Navy News Announcement for November 2008 issue.

NAn announcement was placed in the Navy News which read:

Dennis Robert Williams CPO Telegraphist. Joined St Vincent 1931 then served on Royal Sovereign, Effingham, Exmouth, Wild Swan, Windsor, Sardonyx, Arrow, Scorpion, Dainty, St Angelo, Atherstone where he was awarded the Croix de Guerre at St Nazaire Raid in 1942, Mercury, Scotia, Haitan, Braganza 3, Naval Party 2441, Duke of York and Glasgow. During WW2 he saw action in Home Waters, as well as the Atlantic, Norway, Mediterranean and Far East. He left the RN in 1955 and was employed in the Scientific Service at ASWE Portsdown. On retirement he led a full and active life until his death on the 7th October 2008 aged 93.

This is the summary of His life as read out during the funeral service.

Dennis Robert Williams

Thank you all for coming today and hopefully we will see you all at the Manor so as to toast Dad's life:

Born in Dorchester 3rd June 1915 an elder brother to Eric and Eileen who are here today. As a boy living in Weymouth he developed an interest in Radio Technology which stayed with him throughout his life.

Leaving school aged 14 he started work as a piano tuner but after a visit to Portland Naval Wireless Station he joined the Royal Navy in 1931 as a Telegraphist leaving in 1955.

In the Navy he travelled the world from USA to China but never crossed the Equator.

During WW2 he saw action in the Channel; Norway; Atlantic; Mediterranean and the Far East. He was Beach Master for the Malay and Burma landings as well as taking part in the Japanese surrender of Singapore.

He was awarded the Croix de Guerre - the French gallantry medal for his part in the Commando Raid on St Nazaire in 1942 - twice mentioned in dispatches as well as receiving a number of campaign medals.

In 1952 he was posted to Malta with the family - a memorable and enjoyable experience

For us all.

On leaving the navy he secured a position as a Scientific Officer at the Admiralty Surface Weapons Establishment engaged on the Planning and Installation of RN warship's communication systems.

Retiring at the age of 66 he enjoyed home DIY and gardening as well as holidaying with mother in Gibraltar, Yugoslavia, Spain, Malta and Greece.

Sadly Mum died in 1992 after 55 years of marriage so Dad took up Help the Aged visiting and working in the League of Friends coffee shop at QA Hospital.

He met mother, both aged of 16, on Weymouth promenade and they married when they were 22 resulting in 3 children Denise Born October 1938, Robin born November 1939 and Marjorie born June 1945.

Throughout naval life he enjoyed and participated in all sports, many of which he played for the RN. In recent years he shared the wonders of Portsmouth Football club with his good friends and kind neighbours Derrick and Janice, as well as Sharon and her family. All became good and close friends together with Annabel and Bert who were a great help to him, plus a host of others who he met through the Methodist Church which he attended throughout his life in Drayton.

He is survived by a host of grandchildren and great grandchildren of his direct and extended family.

Cathy, who with David and Bonny and Ann did much to help Dad after mother died, Bethany, James, Liesa and Luke.

Robin Paul, currently in Iraq with the US army. Victoria and Robin Matthew in New Orleans. Vernon who is here today with Jen. Kate and Jim with Natalie, Mia and Aiden in Florida. Linda's family: John, Silmara, Billy, and Gabriela here today. Anita, Michael, George and Michael in Scotland. He was so very proud of them all.

Dad had a long full and generally healthy life although masked some 8 years ago by a series of Heart Attacks and Myasthenia Gravis which he suffered from for a number of years but this did not deter him from participating fully in life - remaining active and alert until his final days.

His interests were wide and varied from using his Computer, Railways, Model Making, DIY, Gardening (ably assisted by Suzy in later years), Church, Hard of Hearing Club and he even learnt to lip read!

One of his interests was the Spinnaker Tower a project he followed from the initial pilings to being one of the first to go up the Tower on opening day - he was looking forward to his next project - Portsmouth FC new ground.

He was a remarkable man who maintained an interest in all around him with many good friends; he was resourceful, honest, courageous and hardworking - although a

hard taskmaster. He also had a sensitive side but like many of his generation, had difficulty in showing it.

He was an extraordinary man - a man I am proud to call My Dad.

The funeral went very well in that the Coffin was adorned with a Union flag with a wreath of Lily's and one of Poppies together with his medals. Leaving 25 Central Road (the family home) the route taken to the Crematorium was along the top of Portsdown Hill past ASWE (where Dad worked) in blazing sunshine so that the sight of Portsmouth and the Isle of Wight below was stunningly visible with the Spinnaker Tower a prominent feature - a very fitting tribute.

There were over 70 persons at the service conducted by a Margaret Hackham - a beautiful service that was fitted to Dad's life with many a tear shed by so many. A wake was held at the Manor House Pub - where Dad had often lunched with a variety of his family and friends on many an occasion - which was attended by approx 50 persons which included a dozen or so from Weymouth, Brother Eric, Sister Eileen and their families.

One thing I have learnt over the last few years is that you never really get to know your father until you reach pensionable age when you can discuss things at a mutual level. I have learnt that my father was a very proper gentleman with high values which he preserved, he disliked dishonestly and corruption and would never try to 'beat the system' for financial gain. He worked hard for his family and valued all those around him never forgetting his roots and upbringing. He was a staunch Labour Party supporter, a member as well as a donator. He hid his emotions and had difficulty in expressing affection - but I know he loved and cared about all those dear to him.