

www.hmsopossum.org

HMS OPOSSUM ASSOCIATION

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AUTUMN NEWSLETTER 2002

1945-58

Welcome to the Autumn issue of our Newsletter. Since this summer has been more wet than dry most of us will be glad to see the back of it.

For those members who live abroad they can tell us how hard life is under hot tropical sun. No doubt if we have a mini heat wave before the Autumn, a sort of Indian summer, the cry will go out to conserve water.

The 17th Commonwealth Games in Manchester has come and gone. As an active volunteer I can vouch that most foreign dignitaries thought our Games the best so far. 10,500 volunteers doing all manner of jobs turned up regularly to do their shifts that covered 18 hours a day. The organisers estimated a drop-out rate in attendance of 10% or more. I was based at the G-Mex and even on the last day we had a cheerful near a 100% turn out.

As many will know in June I did a charity bike ride of 56 miles from Manchester to Blackpool in support of Christies Cancer Hospital and Henshaws Blind Society. The next day I went down with shingles. I struggled on at work for a further week thinking I could shake it off, then I had to call it quits. Now thankfully I'm fully recovered, but only yesterday someone told me the virus can return!!!

Sad to relate the response of our £10 annual subscription has not found favour with several members who have remained silent. A great pity, for our little band of the Opossum Association does not run on plates of fresh air, inflation since our starting point in 1994 has not stood still and as a consequence our costs have increased over the years. Or perhaps the defaulters are away on an extended holiday and have not read the Summer Newsletter. If not please send me your cheque or postal order made out to the Opossum Association. A receipt will be issued.

To date no submariner connected with the submarine Opossum has come to join our Association. But, Sam Edgar the only known man who served on both the frigate and the submarine continues to give his active support. However, we are pleased to welcome as a new member Captain Stewart Porter DSC Rtd. Commanding officer of our ship 1954-56 who spent most of his long naval career in the submarine service.

The Trecarn Hotel at Babbacombe tell me there has been a steady flow of applications for our next reunion, Friday 16th May to Monday 19th May 2003.

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CORRESPONDENCE

Received from : - Ian Janes, Sam Edgar, Willy Mitchell, Brian Healey(2), Nick & Pat Whytock, Lewis Trinder (2), Ron & Kathie Hare(2), Bill Parsons, Bob Henderson, Ken Carson(2), Alister Hunter Blair, Jim Payne, Dick Jay, Bill Price, George Swanwick, Joe Howes, Stan Oldfield, Dick Wright(2), Bert Rimmer, Ken Heap(2) and Stewart Porter.

Letters written: - 15

STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS

Cash in £879.09
Cash out £470.14

Balance £408.95

CHAIRMANS COMMENTS



We are well on our way to our next reunion and it appears some shipmates have still to pay their £10 subscription for 2002-03. If you have a problem contact me either by post or telephone.

Your attention is drawn to page 15 of the Summer Newsletter and have a look into your photograph collections and memory boxes to give us something to smile about. It may bore some shipmates but you have all received your booking forms for next years reunion giving plenty of time to get organised and inform our Secretary of your intentions, i.e. holiday, health or otherwise.

Regards
Stan

ROLL OF HONOUR

John C Cartwright

Albert Corless

Bob Gray

John Williams

Reg Parker

Gorden Fletcher

George H Richards

George Curry

Derek Brown

John Eardley Willmot

Les Wood

David Jarvis

George Scott

Pat Norman

Ivan C Haskell

Fred King

Sid Pemberton

Ronald Bradley

Harry (Scouse) Barlow

Ken Harris

Harry Roach

Fred Thornton

Fred (Mick) Bodel

John Davison

Stephen Hart

WILLY'S WANDERINGS

By Willy Mitchell



Signalman Willy Mitchell

Joined up at HMS St. George an old cavalry barracks at Gosport in the autumn of 1947, aged sweet seventeen and hardly ever been interfered with.

Spent a couple of months running around with a rifle being shouted at by strange people in gaiters and having a perfectly good set of teeth ruined by a Torquemada's dentist. Also learned (but never liked) eating porridge with sugar.

Next step was to HMS Fort Southwick on top of Portsdown Hill for signal course, but spent the entire winter shovelling snow. Come Spring acquired a lady friend and was subsequently hauled up before the C.O. who asked if my intentions were honourable? As I couldn't afford to keep the lady in Guinness for which she had a considerable capacity the reply was in the negative. Got a rapid draft to Chatham to complete my signal course. While my records did not follow immediately, they had heard of me and would be keeping an eye out. Subsequently spent many a happy middle watch guarding pig swill bins. On completing the course transferred to Guzz and soon after a draft chit to frigate

HMS Flamingo bound for the Persian Gulf. While doing the usual 'work up' honed my skills at evading shore patrols.

Once on station our job was carrying out anti-slavery patrols and sorting out disputes between the Trucial Oman states. I was designated signalman of the landing party, someone seemed to want me off the ship as much as possible. Before the development of oil production the local sheikhs passed their time stealing each others sheep and women, some of the sheep were quite presentable. On one occasion we embarked a sheikh and entourage taking them from one village to the next. Another time embarking more protagonists the officer of the landing party told me to advise the ship by semaphore that this party included a mad Nubian slave and to have the Master at Arms standing by. Back on board the Yeoman of Signals questioned why I had sent the semaphore message in a Scottish accent? There had been two bloody great sharks circling the whaler and the Nubian slave had been holding down my ankles. Also could I be excused as I had to attend to an urgent underwater problem.

Our main base in the Gulf was Bahrein. A book I once read by Thor Heyerdahl of Kon Tiki fame claimed that Bahrein was the birthplace of civilisation. But as far as the lower deck was concerned all it meant was a canteen serving warm flat beer in bottles and the odd run up to the oilfields. Basra wasn't too bad as it had a swimming pool and we got the odd RAF flight up to Baghdad for football or rugby. Scheduled for a refit at Bombay we first had to go to Muscat to collect a murderer and take him to a place in Pakistan to be hung. Never understood why the poor bugger couldn't be hung in Muscat where he had killed someone for four pounds of flour. Then on to Bombay for the refit.

Transported for six weeks local leave in Poona where most of the ships company went into hock to the Paybob for the remainder of the commission.

December 1950 embarked on a troopship for Liverpool and began 80 days leave in January 1951. After leave, which to this day remains something of a blur, returned to Guzz for the nine months Leading Signalman's course. There were a number of Aussie and other Dominion buntings and sarkers learning our way of doing things. One particularly hot summer evening after my oppo and I had just finished running around the parade ground with rifles for some minor infringement, we proceeded directly to the rough scrumpie canteen where in rapid succession we each demolished a couple of pints. The Aussies immediately laid bets that we couldn't do the same again. Later I was