

## ***CFVA (London) Branch Newsletter – April 2008.***

Greetings to all!

It wasn't quite the Spring weather that we were hoping to enjoy but that did not deter too many from attending the Branch meeting on the 16<sup>th</sup> of last month. On arrival, we found that due to unusual circumstances, the Wardroom (and the Gunroom) which are usually available for us on HMS Belfast could not be used as they were required for official functions. This was slightly off-putting, as members were due at any time.

But enter Bernie Coot. Many believe that the 'Belfast is Bernie's second home. He seems so well received on board and knows everyone who is worth knowing. Bernie had been instructed 'to find somewhere'. He went ahead and found us accommodation in one of the former seaman's Mess decks, now quite tastefully altered to serve as a private function room for corporate purposes. Playing host, he had arranged tables, chairs etc all ready for the meeting. What would we do without him!

As reported in the Minutes, Vice Chairman Wallis Randall opened the meeting with apologies from the Branch Chairman, who is recovering from a Back operation that has, literally, left him on his back for a period of time. To date, he is progressing well and thanked all who had sent letters and get well cards.

We welcomed John Lambert as a new Associate member of the Branch. John is keenly interested in Coastal Forces matters and is no stranger, having served many years in the Royal Navy. He is well known for his book 'Anatomy of a Ship The Fairmile 'D' Motor Torpedo Boat'. He was co-author with Al Ross for the current two volumes of 'Allied Coastal Forces of WW2' These two volumes are recognised as being at the very top for anyone wishing to research Coastal Forces (Al Ross is a prolific American author centring on the American PT and Sub Chaser craft)

John is currently releasing (June '08) a book, co written with Les Brown, on the 'Flower Class Corvette'. (Les Brown is a former senior employee of Vosper Thornycroft, now retired runs and edits an 'on-line' magazine called 'Escort'.

We hope John's association with the London Branch will be a long and happy one.

Although attendance at the March meeting was better than we might have expected, thoughts turned to members who are, for the moment, less mobile than they would like to be. Bill MacAngus, having heard that Tom Morgan, a long time Branch member, was in Medway Hospital made the journey, accompanied by Jim Barnes, to see him. Having moved out of the area some time ago, Tom has been unable to be present at Branch meetings but never the less keeps his subs. coming and receives the Newsletter. Our best wishes for a speedy recovery are sent.

Our Treasurer, John Williamson, has got tired of putting up with a situation that need attention and opted for an operation and duly entered hospital on the 26<sup>th</sup> March.

George Heard has been unable to attend meetings for some time and is waiting a hospital admission.

And with much regret we learn that Don Campbell, former London Branch Secretary, has been admitted to a care home where he can have the constant attention that is required.

Afraid that's about it. As the doctors say when we see them – "It's all due to your age" – We know!

Once again we are pleased to hear from George Leslie, East Anglia Branch Standard Bearer. Headed "HMS Midge- HMS Mantis Newsletter", he said that he was afraid there was not much news to report although they had had more correspondence from Lt Commander David Harris about dates for their plaques to be displayed, and would let us know when discussions were finalised, this should be very soon. Branch members are steady at 12 to 17 – more if weather is fine and 'Arthur Ritis' leaves them alone! Keep in touch, Les.

With the passage of time it is becoming apparent that some of our members who are able to attend Branch meetings on the 'Belfast are experiencing difficulty in making the last few hundred yards to the ship from their parking spot outside Southwark Crown Court. These are invariably holders of disabled 'Blue Badges' and find the walk necessary to board the

'Belfast painful and distressing. Bill MacAngus is one of the sufferers, and for the last meeting he did hire an invalid chair to help him on the last lap, with Jim Barnes providing the push. We have other members who are in a similar position – Dennis Reeve has difficulty, and in the past (but hopefully not in the future) Ken Gadsdon has been glad on so many occasions to reach the Quarterdeck. And let us not forget that the same situation could be applicable to a wife or partner.

How about considering an arrangement of volunteer "duty pushers" who will walk over and wait outside the Crown Court on receipt of a mobile message from the car saying they are soon to arrive? And if we really do care, what about raising the money to *buy* a chair? CFVA London Branch logo could be displayed, professionally, on the chair and when we have finished with it – a long time from now of course – it could be passed on to a local 'Shopmobility' or Red Cross and our name would still be in the public eye. And it would help a lot of people get around – and some of those who use it, and some of those who see it, might well like to find out a bit more about RN Coastal Forces and those who served.

Is it not worth a thought? Over to you.

Best Wishes

ED. Sec.

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#### **Chairman's Notes:**

It has always been the custom of London Branch that when a new member arrives for his first meeting the Chairman asks him/her to stand and give a short (three minute) talk of his wartime life in the Andrew—be it heroics in the Channel or his shore-based job.

Most victims are a mite embarrassed by this sudden request to re-live, in three minutes, their Navy life, to a bunch of other, though sympathetic and interested ex- matelots. But they rise to the occasion

A few, given the rare chance to expound to a collection of other veterans who "understand like no others", have droned on, it seemed, for ages.

But every one has then been welcomed aboard with a deserved round of applause.

It is an excellent way of settling in.

Now, inevitably, we see few new members coming aboard (literally), but we have been cheered by requests from veterans 'from afar' to join us. They are most welcome and we find their request to join us quite flattering.

As Chairman, it has been my intention to contact, by welcoming letter or phone, each new distant member and to ask for a few details of his naval history so that a potted version can be printed, (if agreed) for readers to see who we have in our midst.

Thanks to medical problems, etc I have had to shelve my intention in 2007 but I now have hope that I shall be able to get in touch with all our distant shipmates –one at a time – by Christmas 2008.

And, for a start, I have much pleasure in introducing **Shipmate Alan Benson** from Weldrake, who has kindly supplied me with his potted wartime history.



Alan modestly claims that, compared with many, he "had a cushy time in the Andrew".

He joined in 1943, 'enjoyed' the usual squarebashing at Chatham and then had a course at the Vernon Torpedo School; then to Brightlingsea to help commission 721.

He states that he had some "notable events" during her running up to Holyhead and Slapton Sands. Then came D Day and he modestly says that by then they had become 'well established', and had 'a few interesting ding dongs' while based at Lowestoft and Yarmouth.

After paying off at Hornet in September 44 he had a short spell on 685, then he joined 713 to test experimental stabilisers in the rough seas off Cornwall. At least, that is what the passenger boffins said.

Commissioned 5007 in Jan 45 but never fired one shot in anger.

Finally the flotilla was sent to Holland on VJday +1 on a prolonged visit to

show the flag.

After Demob Alan returned to finish his broken apprenticeship, married Betty, (one son), had/is having still, a happy active life and is looking forward to their diamond wedding in 2008.

Congratulations Alan; you seem to have had "a cushy life all round" But I suspect your positive outlook played a large part.

We all hope your happy life continues for many more years---but don't forget to keep taking the tablets.

Sincerely  
Ken

I am now pleased to include two reports received from other branches.

#### **EAST ANGLIA BRANCH:**

"Les" from East Anglia, covering Bases HMS Midge and HMS Mantis, has again sent in a Report .(thanks Les).

Meetings are held at the RAOB Club, Lowestoft, on the third Monday of every month. About fifteen members attend regularly but more turn up if the weather is fine.

The branch has its fair share of invalids, but what can we expect at our ages?

They are waiting information from Lt. Cdr. David Harris of CFHT regarding the dates for unveiling the plaques for Lowestoft and Gt Yarmouth CF Bases.

**NORTH MIDLANDS BRANCH:**

The Branch held their 29th AGM on 13<sup>th</sup> March and I forward a summary of their detailed Minutes of the meeting kindly forwarded to me.

Unsurprisingly, the existing Committee was elected to serve for another year.

In his report to members Chairman Ken Birkinshaw regretted that President Clem Mills had been unable to attend as his wife Betty was still recovering after her illness. But Ken wished to record his gratitude to Clem especially for his work in preparing for the Arboretum ceremony.

He thanked his Committee members for their "tremendous support" during the year and also singled out by name many of the Branch stalwarts, always on hand to help.

Secretary Colin Severn had been very busy during the year. With a membership of 44 and meetings attendance averaging 26 he had to be always 'on his toes'.

He ranged over the year's activities: CFVA decommissioning in April, pie chips and peas at Easter, visit to Malta in September, pie chips and peas again in October, unveiling ceremony at the Arboretum in November and the Christmas party in December.

As he quoted: "we have not been marking time" (!)

And already the Branch has a list of activities for 2008: May, CFVA reunion; July, unveiling plaque at Lowestoft; September, unveiling plaque at Great Yarmouth and memorial visit to Vis.

Syd Willoughby, Treasurer, said that the Branch had enjoyed a good year financially, thanks to raffles and generous donations by members and visitors. The Branch was "so lucky in having such supporters" he said. After thanking the two ladies who were kept busy gathering in the money each meeting- raffles etc he then praised Secretary Colin for "breathing life into our meetings over the past few years".

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I appreciate that some Branches might not be able to access our Newsletters. If requested I will arrange to send a copy to every Branch sending in a report, and ask that it is shown on the notice board at their meetings.

Ken Gadsdon

**Vice Chairman's Notes:**

Hear we are again, April showers and hail and snow (I don't believe it! all this talk about Global Warming).

The March meeting went off OK and I apologised for the lack of the news letter on our site. Ken our Chairman is making good progress. I rather like Eddie's idea to purchase a wheelchair to help those of us who are a bit infirm; I wonder what happened to the wheelchair the old association purchased for the use of members.

I too listened enthralled as John Lambert swung the lamp, how did you manage to go on for so long John?

**East Lancashire Branch AGM:**

Meeting held on 16<sup>th</sup>. March 08

Present 7 members

Apologies, Ron Collinge, Muriel Bostock, Joe/Joyce Smith, Eric Crowther, Ken Leigh.

Minutes of the meeting of 20<sup>th</sup> Jan 2007 were read and approved  
Proposed by Joe Ashcroft, Seconded, Syd Morton.

**East Lancs Secretary's Report:** London Branch Newsletter received with details of new Website. Photos of the Arboretum and HMS Gregale were seen.

The Treasurer noted that the receipts for 2007 were only a little down from the last total. Considering the drop in numbers this was not entirely unexpected but he noted that it was the proceeds from our raffles which had kept the difference so low.

**East Lancs Chairman's Report:** On the occasion of our AGM he reported that 2007 had been a good year in that no deaths had been reported and the Branch was still carrying on albeit with a reduced membership, he expressed to those who still continued to attend. The main event of the year had of course been the closure of the Association. It was appreciated that this was unavoidable; but the closing ceremonies, although sad, had nevertheless been absolutely great and worthy of the occasion.

**AOB:** The Treasurer noted that the response to his reminder about branch subs in the last newsletter did not produce much response, and he is now repeating it! We really do need them, so please do your best.

Next meeting is May 18<sup>th</sup> 2008

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Next London Branch Meeting is also May 18<sup>th</sup> 2008

Wallis Randall