

It was cold – really cold and the usual crowds that, in the summer, jostled their way along the Thames waterfront were conspicuous by their absence. Those hardy people that were around wandered along, collars turned up around their necks to keep out the wind, the ice cream vendors absent and probably enjoying the sunshine in Tenerife on the proceeds of the summer trade. We wandered past the gift shop and along the access way to the quarterdeck of the 'Belfast where the duty watch check that members of the public have their right tickets. Rig of the day – greatcoats. It was London Branch meeting day and we were fortunate that the weather did not deter too many from attending our meeting and all went well.

Quite a few Branch members and their partners attended the Remembrance Service held on the previous Sunday aboard HMS Belfast. We were remembering those did not come back, but in common with most service people who came through the war; we knew we were among the lucky ones. To be standing on the deck of one of H.M. Warships, one that had played its part well during hostilities, heightened the pride we felt both for the Royal Navy and for those whose memory we were honouring. Sharing our pride, and present at the Service, were Admiral Lord West and Sir Morgan Giles whom we saw later.

After the Service, members of the Branch collected in the Gunroom where the City of London Sea Cadets had arranged refreshments for us. We were indebted to them for helping in so many ways in connection with our meetings. After an interval of time our Chairman (who had previously met Admiral Lord West) had the bright idea of wending his way one deck down to the Wardroom to meet Admiral Lord West again and perhaps ask him if he would like to come up to the Gunroom to meet some of the 'lower deck'. To keep the story short, this was exactly what happened. Both Admiral Lord West and Sir Morgan Giles came to the Gunroom to meet Branch members and their guests. It was a fitting close to the day. The raffle that took place earlier realised £110.00 and this was passed to the Sea Cadets as a donation to their funds.

The Branch AGM is scheduled for the 20th of January next, and nominations are welcomed for changes on the make up of the Committee from Chairman downwards. The present Committee have been there for a considerable time and would be pleased to have a break. Nominations to Branch Secretary would gladden some hearts!

Consideration is being given to introducing items of interest to members during our meetings, perhaps taking the form of talks given by people with knowledge of their subject that could prove informative and at the same time entertaining to members. Several Branches do, or have done this. Ted Else has offered to give a talk on websites at the January meeting and with the aid of a projector and hopefully a wireless link to the internet, give us a feel of what it is all about. It is fair to say that most of us have no real knowledge about the subject, and a talk by someone who has, would be enlightening.

Most members will voice their approval at the proposed move by the Coastal Forces Heritage Trust to contact all CFVA members by letter to assess what support there was for the CFHT to produce a six monthly newsletter to provide a link for members. This would of course require finance, but finance could be obtained through a subscription from those participating. It is to be hoped that the venture would be widely supported. Communication is one of our weaker links and anything that can be done to improve this aspect is important. London Branch welcomes news on how other Branches are faring and would like to thank East Lancashire Branch for their regular contribution of news about their meetings, the periodic letters from Moss Thomas sending greetings from the North East Branch to let us know how all six of them are getting on. We were also very pleased recently to receive a letter from Mr G. Lesslie – 'Les' as he signs himself. The letter was headed 'East Anglia Branch, HMS Mantis, HMS Midge, Lowestoft and Great Yarmouth Branches' Now there are names to bring back memories! Someone the other day remarked that HMS Hornet seems to be mentioned to the exclusion of any of the other bases. Well, here we are now – step forward Mantis and Midge! They have many stories to tell.

Les is Standard Bearer for the East Anglia Branch and in that capacity attends many local parades with a good muster. He says that in common with most Branches, age and sickness have taken their toll although they have been able to enlist quite a few outlying members who's Branches have ceased and who have joined by post. The East Anglia Branch Secretary passes the London Branch Newsletter over to him and it is through this he writes to us. If any of our members find themselves on holiday in the

Yarmouth/Lowestoft area next year, Les invites them to go to Oulton Broad's Everit Park where, opposite the museum, there they will be able to see the East Anglia Branch's Memorial to Coastal Forces. A nice touch – there must be a lot of 'Les's' left in the Association who can tell us about their own local items of interest.

Turning to home affairs, the Branch Committee met on the 27th November to formalise the make up of a 'Sub Committee' to take care of website matters. This has been in our minds for some time – it has become clear that to achieve our objectives a sub committee of enthusiasts interested in the project are going to do better than a general committee, who's members may or may not be driven the passion that is required.

Ken Gadsdon has agreed to Chair the sub committee with Wallis Randall (CFVA Librarian) and Ted Else as initial members. The sub committee will be free, at their direction, to co-opt any 'specialists' to serve on the committee, (though this will not give anyone so doing 'Branch Membership')

It is envisaged that the Website Sub Committee will liaise with, and be responsible to, the main committee who will have overriding control.

ED. Sec.

Chairman's Notes:

As you can see from our Branch Newsletter the past few weeks have been a busy one, especially for the Committee.

Memorial plaque at HMS GREGALE Malta:

We received a report from two of our members, Peter Bickmore and Peter Shorer who recently joined a party of veterans at the unveiling ceremony of a commemorative plaque at our old WW2 base HMS GREGALE in Malta.

One of the many functions of our 'parent ship' The Coastal Forces Heritage Trust, is to supply and place commemorative plaques at Coastal Forces Bases worldwide.

The unveiling and blessing of the plaque, at Ta'Xbiex Marina, Malta, was attended by the British High Commissioner, the Mayor of Ta'Biex, the Chairman and Director of our Heritage Trust, and the last Chairman of CFVA. Also in attendance at this moving ceremony was a strong party of CFVA 'Med' veterans and many Maltese veterans of the siege of this Island of the George Cross.



Courtesy: P. Shorer

The final tribute was made by many of the dignitaries taking a launch out to open water to lay wreaths in homage to our shipmates who did not return to their families, as we did.



Courtesy: P. Shorer

The scene is now more civilian than Naval as we knew it. Instead of the concrete Parade Ground surrounded by MTB's, it is now a boulevard and abounds with luxury yachts.

Peter Bickmore had produced good footage of the ceremony and the activities following, and can reproduce DVD copies for £10 (profits to The Heritage Trust). Peter Shorer has given us a disc of photos, two of which are shown here.

Website Sub Committee:

We are in need of a couple of website nerds and are trying to recruit a couple of likely lads to help improve our site/s and teach website complexities to Wallis and me. Wallis surprised us all by announcing that he has managed to get our very own website www.royalnavycoastalforcesveterans.org up and running, though with some need for improvement. Wallis started from scratch, (like me only a short while ago he still thought a mouse was cat food) and despite severe home problems has managed, with the minimum of help and a maximum of shipmate abuse, to get his site launched. We intend running in parallel with this site until we are convinced that our Navy site reaches the standard of our temporary BMPT site.

But of course, Ted's position with the site on BMPT, complete with its Forum, will remain. We are grateful to the BMPT patriots for providing the facilities for Ted to run these excellent pages on Coastal Forces matters.

And, of course, we also have our Coastal Forces Heritage Trust website < www.coastal-forces.org.uk > to see.

I understand that the site will be having a refit in the New Year, and we wish it well.

It is our hope that it will take over our function when we 'proceed to calmer waters'.

Other Branches:

Members at our meeting suggested that we should still try to enrol the support of other Branches and give us a report - however short - of their activity. Result? the Chairman was directed to write to all Branch Secretaries forthwith.

AOB:

Following prods from our 'boisterous' group – (popularly known as the 'the stokers mess')- earlier in the year, that we should make our meeting even more interesting, you will see that we have asked Ted Else, our captive nerd, to give us a short talk on the wonders of the Internet. Our Branch is not alone in having 95% computer illiteracy, but I am sure that after Ted has finished there will be a rush to PC World by a crowd of converted octogenarian matelots.

On the domestic front I am relieved to report that we have only two rather more serious casualties. Bill Mc Angus has fallen again and this time bashed his head somewhat, but is now out of hospital. It has been suggested to Bill that he should stop the flow of special Scottish 'mineral water' that his Northern shipmates send him. And our blind shipmate Howard Spencer is still modestly 'rather poorly', and apologises for missing the last two meetings. Howard is one of our few quietly spoken and modest shipmates. How he manages to get to our Meetings, involving three London Transport changes, I do not know, but he says there is still a lot of kindness on London's streets.

Members were also reminded that our next meeting would be our AGM and the entire Committee were praying to be replaced by other members. Perhaps the Stokers Mess? We will see.

The remaining chatter was on our planned week's "Winter Sports" in early January at a holiday camp on the Isle of Wight..... ??? Yes, but it's so much cheaper in January.

Including supporters, 37 of us will be there to enjoy our good company and to disturb the other inmates.

Particularly, we were pleased that two members of another Branch and their wives are included in the group.

And now, on behalf of London Branch, I wish all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Ken G

Chairman