

H.M.S. Ajax & River Plate Veterans Association

NEWSLETTER



DECEMBER 2013

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H.M.S. AJAX & RIVER PLATE VETERANS ASSOCIATION.

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CHAIRMAN'S/EDITOR'S REMARKS

As we approach the Festive season may I wish you all a very Merry Christmas and a very Happy New Year. It promises to be a busy year and I hope you will be able to join in as many of the 75th Anniversary events as possible.

Subscriptions I am pleased to report that our Treasurer proposed that there will be no increase in this year's subs (Currently £10) and this was endorsed at the AGM – but this is a reminder that they are now due for the current year.

Dates for the diary 2014 – Unveiling of the Memorial at the NMA – **12th April**. Visit to Canada – key events over the period of **13th to 16th June**. Further details of both events in this newsletter. It will really help with the organisation if members intending to be present inform the committee of their intentions to ensure the smooth running of the events. **13th December** – lunch at Portsmouth – more details concerning this event in the March newsletter.

Articles for the Newsletter A request was made for those who have yet to send the Editor an article, to perhaps correct the omission and send one in. The post bag remains empty!!!!!!!

48th Annual Reunion A good attendance of 52 members gathered at the King Charles Hotel and this included 9 attending for the first time. We were honoured to have Ted Wicks and John Garrard, two veterans from the River Plate with us. "Up Spirits" greeted members – well managed by Alf Larkin and Doug Harris. A very nice meal was served under the supervision of Debbie Degorgio before Malcolm and Judi Collis with the assistance of Brendon Hewett conducted the raffle - Brendon is the grandson of Fred Coates and the youngest member of the Association. In the absence of a guest speaker, members present were asked to say a few words about their connection with the Association and this was both entertaining and much appreciated. Cliff Hoppe maintained his high standard of recording the evening on his camera – another aspect which the members appreciate. The Chairman read out a letter of greeting from Mayor Steve Parish and members showed their grateful thanks for the wonderful donation from the Town for the Memorial Fund. A Thank You card was signed and an official acknowledgement sent to the Mayor which he read out to his Town Council. On Thursday, the Memorial Service was conducted by The Reverend Canon Paul Kerr, who returned to us after missing last year while he was on duty in the Falkland Islands. The AGM was held on return to the Hotel and refreshments taken prior to departure.

Travel Insurance At the AGM, members contemplating travelling to Canada sought details of companies who might offer insurance cover for senior members. I am grateful to members who have submitted the following details:-

3.

- i) AVANTI 0800 066 5604 also enquiries@avanti.co.uk
- ii) Rothwell and Towler, Tourism House, Pynes Hill, Exeter EX2 5WS Tel: 0845 9080171.
Also www.rothwellandtowler.co.uk and info@rothwellandtowler.co.uk
- iii) AgeUK 0800 1696565 also www.ageuk.org.uk
- iv) Insure and Go, Insurance Services Ltd, Maitland House, Warrior Square, Southend-on-Sea
SS1 2JY Tel 02077 488593
also www.insureandgo.com
- v) STAYSURE 0800 652 8152 (recently nominated for best Travel Insurance Provider);
another number 0800 652 8294 Quote DTEL-07.

Letter from Bill Smail My thanks to Bill Smail who wrote to me as follows:

“I was serving in HMS AJAX on 6/6/44 and although I cannot recall Harold Siggins, I agree with his description of the “atmosphere” on D-Day absolutely. I would also like to add one personal memory. We sailed for Normandy from the Firth of Clyde, about the 4th June, and ran into the terrible weather which Harold mentions and which gave the High Command such terrible problems at HQ. I remember we were turned back off the Welsh coast and for many hours sailed up and down that coast, awaiting instructions. One of our lookouts had marked a point on the shoreline where we reversed our track, and by my memory, was when he came down to our messdeck where some of us were having a short break, and said “O.K. chaps, that's it, we've gone past the mark – WEARE ON OUR WAY”.

Anyway I could not better Harold's description of the scene when we arrived, then when our first broadside went off, you were too busy to think of anything but the job in hand.”

By Editor – if there are other memories of the D Day action, please send them in.

Article from Richard Llewellyn An interesting article from Richard on his experiences on board HMS AJAX.

Article from Cynthia Diamond It is nice to publish an article from Cynthia on activities within the town concerning street naming from members of the ship's company.

Letter from Mayor Steve Parish This is published for those unable to attend the Reunion.

AGM The 2013 AGM and accounts are enclosed with this newsletter.

Web Site this forms a major part of publicising the Association, so please encourage friends to make good use of it.

Article from Brandon Hewett Brendon has written:-

“Thank you for making me welcome during the 48th Reunion. I enjoyed myself learning about the lives that you had. I hope that in my life I can look back like you all do and enjoy your kind of company. The visit to the dockyard was great fun, the submarine visit was brilliant. The big advantage that I had was being the youngest and smallest which allowed me to get into the smallest of corners. The Cavalier was special, my Grandad was on her a long time ago and he was able to show me around and point out all the places he worked at. If my granddad can get me out of school again (he is pretty good at it) I look forward to other reunions. Thank you all for a fun time. I have many photographs and memories to look back on.”

By Editor – Thank you Brandon for your kind words – we are pleased you enjoyed yourself, we also enjoyed your company.

Article from Ian Wright Ian has kindly sent me a photograph taken shortly after Christmas 1945 when the ship was in Rio. He adds “A friend of mine was the Chairman of the Association of Australian Stock Exchanges. I knew that he had married a South American lady but that was all. I had arranged a dinner with him at a Melbourne hotel where I was staying and the subject of the AJAX visit to Rio de Janeiro came up and I went to get a photograph from my room of a party (booze-up) taken in Sao Paulo. My friend's reaction was very surprising; he said I recognise you, but remarkably you are standing beside the lady that became my wife several years later. As they say “it's a small world”.



By Editor – how many other members recall this party in Sao Paulo?

4.

Visit to the NMA at Alrewas On 24th October Stephen Harwood, Malcolm and Judi Collis, Jim Smith and myself visited the NMA for an on site meeting with Paul Kennedy, the Curator, and Keith Rackham, the stone mason, to progress arrangements for the installation of our Memorial. I enclose a photograph of a “cardboard cut out (Blue Peter style)” of the memorial to give an indication of size and one of the proposed location. In addition there will be 4 benches placed two each side of the memorial. It will be next to the Falkland Island memorial in the Royal Navy part of the Arboretum.



Site for the River Plate Memorial - between the first two trees nearest bench.



From left to right: Peter Danks, Stephen Harwood, Jim Smith, Keith Rackham (mason), Judi and Malcolm Collis, Paul Kennedy (curator) with scale model of memorial.

Visit to Canada I attach an update from Alf Larkin.

CANADA- JUNE 2014. The main events are as follows:

Friday 13th - Battle of the River Plate lecture by Jonathan Harwood

Sunday 15th – Remembrance Ceremony on Ajax waterfront, followed by a reception at the Ajax Legion Hall.

Monday 16th – Presentation of Admiral Harwood's Uniform to the town of Ajax followed by Street dedications.

Unless you are planning an extended stay in Canada, the suggested flight times are leaving the UK around lunch time on Tuesday 10th June which arrived in Canada early afternoon and departing Toronto Airport early evening on Tuesday 17th June arriving back in UK on the morning of Wednesday 18th June.

The saving on Airline Group Booking is approximately £20 per head and the Airline requires a signed contract and a large deposit. Therefore individuals must make their own bookings and it is advisable to book early to guarantee the best price.

Hotel rooms are charged per room per night. Please let me know if you are prepared to share a twin room which will half the room cost. Please book your rooms using a credit card which is not charged until you check in at the Hotel. Choice of accommodation as follows:

Garden Hilton, 500 Beck Crescent, Ajax L17 1C9 Tel 001905686 9400
www.hilton-garden-inn.hilton.com

Super 8, 210 Westney Road, Ajax L15 7P9 Tel 001800454 3213
gm@ajaxsuper8.com

Google Canada Flights or Tel Air Canada 0871 2201111

British Airways 0844 493 0787

Any problems contact alflarkin@btinternet.com Tel 01305 457259

Possible trips to Niagara Falls and the CN Tower will be forwarded in due course.

By Editor – thanks to Alf for these details. I believe there are too many variables for a group booking to be made and support his view that flight and accommodation arrangements should be made on an individual basis.



Office of the Mayor

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TOWN OF AJAX

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September 26, 2013

HMS Ajax & River Plate Veterans Association
c/o Mr. Peter Danks and Malcolm Collis

Dear Veterans and HMS Ajax and River Plate Veteran Association Members and Friends:

I am sorry that I and Members of Council are unable to be with you tonight for the 48th Annual General Meeting Reunion of the HMS Ajax and River Plate Veterans Association.

We here at the Town of Ajax are looking forward to next year's 75th anniversary celebrations. We are beginning to plan our June 2014 commemorative event that will take place in Ajax. We are also excited to have a representative from the Town participate in the December 2014 celebrations happening in England.

I am also very pleased to share with you the following good news. The Town of Ajax will be assisting the Association in the commissioning of The Battle of the River Plate Memorial. The Town is committed to contributing 5,000 Canadian Dollars to help the association reach its fundraising goal. We believe this memorial will be wonderful enhancement to The National Memorial Arboretum and a fitting tribute to those that served.

On behalf of Ajax Town Council, I send you our warmest greetings and wish you all the best for tonight's festivities as you reacquaint with dear friends and colleagues.

We hope to see many members and friends visit our Town next June. I invite those that plan to make the trip to contact my office in advance of your visit, doing so will provide us the opportunity to officially welcome you to our community.

See you in 2014!

Sincerely,



Steve Parish
Mayor, Town of Ajax

ARCHIVIST UPDATE

The new property is taking up much of our time and those on Facebook will have seen some of the pictures of the various stages: apologies if our Ajax service has not been up to its usual standard but we hope to get back to normal come the spring! My never-ending Wickes, Screwfix and B&Q orders continues to earn the memorial fund free money thanks to being registered with easyfundraising. You too could register with easyfundraising and earn us some more free money.

INFORMATION SOUGHT ON FORMER AJAX CREW MEMBERS

Not too many enquiries during this Newsletter period but I would be very pleased to receive information on the following:

ALEXANDER SPENCE CALLANDER

Maggie Callander is seeking information about her father who served on Ajax at the time of The Battle of the River Plate.

WILLIAM PRITCHARD

Gordon Pritchard is also after information about his great uncle who he believes served on Ajax at some stage – not much to go on though.

Requests for help seem to be slowing but if you know any of the above please let me know.

Details are also on the “Do you know” page on the website <http://www.hmsajax.org/#/do-you-know/4567205451>

CHURCH PENNANT

In the last Newsletter I poised the question regarding the Church Pennant: thanks to Jim Smith for his detailed response confirming it was the correct one and also supplying a coloured image. Jim also helped Richard Llewellyn identify a mis-titled Ajax photograph as being Warspite.

CAPTAIN MEDLEY

I have received a copy of the memoirs of Captain Medley who served on Ajax at The Plate and was staff officer to Commodore Harwood. Stephen Harwood currently has them to assist in his researches and at some stage I shall include excerpts in future Newsletters – when the house is finished!

Malcolm Collis – Archivist

MEMORIAL UPDATE

Members of the Memorial Committee met up with our Stonemason and NMA representatives at the National Memorial Arboretum in October. Things are moving along nicely and the final memorial draft is about to be sent to the Stonemason who will produce a full scale mock-up prior to us signing-off. The next stage will be chisel against granite so we need to get it right!

GIFT AID

Thanks to all those who have sent me their completed gift aid forms – it really does make a tremendous difference and considerably swells the funds with “free” money. A few more resulted from the Reunion. There are few members who probably qualify but as yet have not sent in their gift aid so please do so as we can claim the tax element on donations AND future subscriptions.

DEDICATION EVENT

The dedication event is booked for Saturday 12th April 2014 and I was hoping to be able to give full details in this Newsletter but unfortunately I am lacking some information from the NMA. The plan is to have the dedication event at 11 a.m. followed by a formal luncheon in the permanent marquees, with a few brief speeches. The cost of the lunch is one of the details yet to be supplied.

I will circulate details by email and post as and when I get them but if you wish you can provisionally let me know if you intend to attend the dedication event and whether you would wish to dine. I can then start to draw up a provisional list. I will also circulate details of local accommodation should you wish to make a weekend of it.

Malcolm Collis

Membership Secretary's Update December 2013

I am pleased to report that we have 3 new Associate members, we welcome:

Roger Herrod the son of the late **Kenneth Valentine Herrod** an Able Seaman on the cruiser from 1943 to 46. Roger lives in Bishop's Stortford.

Mrs Barbara Hopkins and **Mrs Julie Pullen** both from Folkestone, Kent are daughters of the late **Colin Chadwick**. They have sent me details of Colin's Naval career. He was a member when he crossed the bar on 1st October 2012. He was 90 and also lived at Folkestone. Colin joined the RN on 31st January 1938 and left the service on 4th June 1953. He was a Boy on Ajax at the time of the Battle of the River Plate. Chadwick Drive in Ajax was named in his honour. He was on HMS Jackal when it sank on 12th May 1942 and was soon after Combined Operations, Tank Landing craft and took part in the D Day landings.

Crossed the Bar

I am pleased to say I have had no reports of any of our members crossing the bar since the last newsletter.

Happy Birthday to the following Members who had birthdays in this Newsletter period (September to November inc.):

Frank Burton	Ajax 1938 – 39	95 on 4th September
Bob Gee	Ajax 1946	88 on 12th September
John Hitchen	Ajax 1942 – 1943	90 on 23rd September
Mike Turner	Ajax 1946 – 47	88 on 24th September
Trevor Dixon	Ajax 1973 – 75	66 on 9th October
Terry Webster	Ajax 1976 – 78	56 on 17th October
Ken Holden	Ajax 1942 – 1943	94 on 23rd October
Kenneth Ward	Ajax 1968 – 1970	66 on 26th October

(Apologies to anyone not mentioned in this or previous editions – to rectify this, please complete your update form and send to the Membership Secretary

Member **Clive Morris** still has his house in California but is going to be spending most of his time at Grand Rapids Michigan.

Clive is returning to the Falklands for a visit in January staying in Stanley, San Carlos and Port Howard. He is taking some poppy crosses for a few veterans. If any members wish him to place any note or cross on any particular monument he is happy to do so. cmorrisrpm@aol.com (805) 479 4556 We look forward to Clive joining us in Ajax in June for the River Plate celebrations.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

The annual subscription is still £10 with a family membership of £15. A gentle reminder that subs are due in January. Sorry to nag, but it really does save lots of time and expense if they are paid early in the year. We are trying to make it as easy as possible for you and the various methods of parting with your money are listed below. Please ring me if you have any problems.

Subscription can be paid by:

1. Standing Order - Association Account details: 'HMS Ajax & River Plate Veterans Association': Number -- 24865868: Sort Code -- 30-99-56
2. Bank Transfer - Association Account details: 'HMS Ajax & River Plate Veterans Association': Number -- 24865868: Sort Code -- 30-99-56
3. Cheques & Postal Orders made payable to - 'HMS Ajax & River Plate Veterans Association' and posted to Membership Secretary 'The Bewicks, Station Road, Ten Mile Bank, Downham Market, Norfolk PE38 0EU
4. By using the new "Subscribe" button on the website and paying by PayPal or credit/debit card – see <http://www.hmsajax.org/#/joining/4560949163>

This will deduct £10 but many of you pay extra to help with costs (Thanks); any extra donation can be paid through the “Donate” button on the website – see <http://www.hmsajax.org/#/memorial-fund/4567554524>

May I and Malcolm wish you all a very merry Christmas and a happy and healthy 2014. Thank you for all your support in 2013.

NEWS FROM TOWN OF AJAX by Cynthia Diamond



1. April 10, 2013 - Chapman Drive Dedication – Simon & Jilly Chapman visited Ajax for the street dedication in honour of Simon's father, Alex Ashley Chapman Lieutenant Commander, HMS Ajax who served during the Battle of the River Plate. The Town identified a number of other veterans sharing the same surname who either served during the Battle of the River Plate or on the HMS Ajax during WWII. So the Town had a larger plaque installed to recognize all the known veterans with the surname Chapman. The plaque on Chapman Drive was placed and dedicated in honour of the following veterans: Alec Ashley Chapman HMS Ajax; Eric Primrose Chapman HMS Achilles; Walter Chapman HMS Achilles; & Albert Chapman HMS Achilles who served during the Battle of the River Plate as well as dedicated to, George Chapman HMS AJAX; J Chapman HMS Ajax; & A. L. Chapman HMS AJAX; who served during World War II.



2. August 30, 2013 – Hibbard Drive Dedication – Tony (son) & Sue Hibbard along with Frances (daughter) & Peter Collacott came to Ajax for the street dedication in honour of their father, Edward Clarence Hibbard, HMS Ajax who served during the Battle of the River Plate.

3. October 1, 2013 - Martinworth Lane Dedication – Jen Wilson (daughter) and Wilson family visited Ajax for the street dedication in honour of Wallace Martin HMS Achilles; Once again, the Town identified a number of other veterans sharing the same surname who either served during the Battle of the River Plate or on the HMS Ajax during WWII. So the Town had a larger plaque ordered to be installed to recognize all the known veterans with the surname Martin. The plaque on Martinworth Lane was dedicated in honour of the following



veterans: Wallace Martin HMS Achilles; Albert Martin HMS Achilles; Arthur C. Martin HMS Achilles; Reginald A. Martin HMS Achilles; & Trevor Martin HMS Achilles; who served during the Battle of the River Plate as well as dedicating to, A. Martin HMS Ajax; David Martin HMS Ajax; Edward Martin HMS Ajax; J Martin HMS Ajax; John Martin HMS Ajax; L. Martin HMS Exeter; R. L. Martin HMS Ajax; S. Martin HMS Ajax; & T. P. Martin HMS Ajax; who served during World War II.

The Town of Ajax looks forward to the June 2014 visit and the upcoming 75th reunion celebrations. Wishing you all the best.



Brief account of my time in HMS Ajax and relating to the Invasion of Europe by Richard Llewellyn

Having had no other target in my life than going to sea I was entered for Pangbourne Nautical College and became an RNR Cadet there in September 1939. I left school as soon as School Certificate Exams were taken - May 1943. Age 17. School trained students for a career at sea - so one of my Exam Passes was in Navigation which bore fruit over the next few years. Spent 2 months at Greenwich Naval College and Chatham Gunnery School learning gunnery and various other skills, as well as being toughened up before being posted as Midshipman on 21st September 1943 to HMS Howe, a battleship which was part of the Atlantic Fleet and was lying in Scapa Flow.

In December 1943 I transferred to HMS Ajax, a light cruiser berthed alongside in Portsmouth. As was normal routine in the war a ship with a new crew had to embark on a 'working up' programme - which involved everybody becoming familiar with their Action Station duties, etc. and practicing all the many exercises which eventually converts the ship into an efficient fighting machine. So it was that I found myself sailing back to Scapa flow where I guess we arrived about Christmas Eve. On December 26th, Battleships and Cruisers of the Fleet returned from engaging and sinking the German Battleship 'Scharnhorst' off the coast of Norway. Scapa Flow in winter is cold, wet, gales and not the best place to do anything!

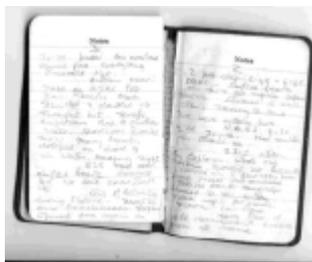
So our working up programme terminated, and on January 18th and we set sail for Plymouth, where we arrived on 20th. Even in January the contrast between Scapa Flow and the greenery of Plymouth Sound was something to stir the heart. In Plymouth we stored ship, and took on ammunition and all the other provisions needed for an extended period away.

Having learned some of the arts of navigation at school I became the Navigating Officers 'dogsbody', called the Navigator's Tanky, which was OK as my Action Station was always on the bridge, which meant that I had a front row view of what was happening, as well as being privy to where the ship was going to, etc.



On 28th January we sailed for the Mediterranean. The first 24 hours we met severe storms and had solid green water coming over the bridge and causing damage to the structure. The crew were mostly young and their first sea trip and I recall the sailor's mess deck was awash with vomit. But they recovered after a couple of days. Our first stop was Gibraltar where we arrived on 31st January to gorgeous warm sunshine! I remember it well, never having been further away from UK than Brittany in 1939! And these were the days when long distance overseas travel was the privilege of the very few - and obviously not at all during the war! After the drabness of wartime Britain in winter it was a bit of magic!

We stayed in the Mediterranean until May and in the intervening months travelled extensively in the central and eastern Med. Life fairly routine, and included a bombardment of Rhodes harbour, time in Malta and then Naples where we supported the Allied landings at Anzio a little further north along the coast. We were lucky enough to be in Naples during the eruption of Vesuvius which was spectacular. Anchored in the Bay of Naples each night and had to hose the ash off the decks each morning. Visited Pompeii, climbed to the top of Vesuvius with the help of the army, and went to a performance of La Boheme at the San Carlo Opera House - looking a little the worse for wear after years of war, but a memorable occasion never the less. We sailed for UK and on May 10th arrived in Gibraltar in the middle of the night for oil and left before it got light. Since most of the cruisers in the Med. were doing the same thing secrecy was important because of the build-up to the invasion of France - but we didn't know that at the time. We returned to Scapa Flow and the next couple of weeks was spent doing more gunnery practice and spending a few days in Greenock where some early radar sets were installed. We left on 3rd June



June 1944 - The Invasion of Europe. The following are notes scribbled in my diary, often in very difficult circumstances, during those few amazing days around 6th June 1944 - D-Day. The pencilled writing has faded over 65 years and in places is not easy to read and, coming from an 18 year old, they probably don't do justice to such an historic occasion! And I have recently discovered that the Midshipman's Journal that I had to keep contains a more detailed account of this event. But this is the first time I've looked at it for 60 years!! The British War Museum were interested in my Diary and my Midshipman's Log Book and that is where both now reside.

Saturday June 3rd. "This morning at 1130 we left Greenock in company with the Cruiser Squadron. This includes 'Belfast' (C.S.10.) (Cruiser class 10) 'Diadem' 'Orion' 'Emerald' 'Argonaut' and ourselves. ('Ajax'). Last night left Greenock & what with all the secret conferences etc., which have been going on, we more or less knew we were going to take part in the second front. Whether we were to go direct or stop at a south coast port we didn't know until the captain spoke over the S.R.E. after leaving Greenock. He said that we were now on our way to open the second front and our job was to get the army ashore & maintain them there. We were liable to do much bombardment & spend long hours at action stations. He said he had great confidence in us & knew Ajax would maintain her fine traditions.

It is now just 1500 hours and I intend to jot all the happenings of the next few days in this diary. Naturally, at present we are all wondering what to expect from the enemy & where we shall be required first. I think that we may be going in the Cherbourg direction but that remains to be seen. At lunch time today the conversation ran on the lines of who'd be coming out OK. Personally I think that this is a bad line for a conversation but it was really only jokingly. Somehow I have a feeling of confidence that we'll all be OK and I hope on leave before long. (Much overdue)!! At present we are just leaving the Firth of Clyde & entering the Irish Channel or North Channel whichever it is. I'm not sure. I have the 'first dog' and unfortunately the Middle watch. – however !!

Sunday June 4th 2230. Tonight, but for the one most unfortunate factor we should now be steaming in towards the French Coast. This morning however it was decided the weather was too rough for the invasion to start so the whole thing has been delayed. Much disappointment was felt when this was announced. To-night however the prospects look better. The sun is out & the sea is moderating. At this moment, 2230, we are approximately in the same position as last night. During the day we have steamed around in the Irish Sea.

When I think of it the fact that the whole Invasion of Europe has been delayed perhaps a matter of 24 hours, it seems incredible. There must have been much misgiving amongst the high officials to-day and great feats of reorganisation must have been performed. I believe it is just as well it didn't start 24 hours before it was first due as the results might have been disastrous! Owing to the heavy seas more men and materials to support the initial landings could not have been put ashore. I only hope the delay won't have any long term ill effects. I have the First Watch to-night so should get a good night's sleep!

Monday June 5th. 1315. After an anxious forenoon during which the sea was really rough we have rounded Land's End and are now on our way up the Channel. The waves have gone down and the sun is shining. The coast of Cornwall is visible and the sea is a wonderful blue. One might almost say 'perfect invasion weather!' The Captain has just broadcast telling us the Second Front is liable to start any hour and we must be prepared for attacks from the enemy, particularly from E-boats, U-boats and the air. E-Boats seem to be the most probable source of danger at the moment.

22.30. 'The Invasion is on!' At Night Action Stations. The Commander told us what is to happen. I went go into details as they will soon be news. After N.A Action Stations I visited the Plot and discovered the details from Torps (Torpedo Officer). We go to Action Stations at 0400 which suits me nicely as I was to have had the Morning Watch anyway! We should arrive at our Bombardment position at 0445 and when it is light 0515 (approx) commence our shoot at a 6" shore battery. At 0645 Heavy Bombers come in and at 0725 our troops land.

At 2000 to-night mine sweepers started to sweep channels for us and during to-night paratroopers are to be landed. At the moment I am just about to turn in and hope no events take place before 0400. Everything is quite normal on the ship, just a slight feeling of excitement and everyone is pleased that we are at last doing what we came back from the Med to do.

Wednesday June 7th. 0145 To-day has been a very tiring but very interesting day. Since this morning, or in actual fact yesterday morning as this is being written in the Middle Watch. However, I'll refer to it as to-day still. We closed up at Action Stations at 0400. We were then passing down the swept channel made by our Mine Sweepers earlier. The channel was marked by buoys and was only 4 cables wide. It led due South to the Invasion area - between Le Havre and Cherbourg. As we steamed down the channel at 12 knots we passed convoys of LCTs, invasion craft, and transports which were to come in later. Along the French coast our bombers were busy, fires raging.

0500 reached buoy marking end of swept channel, turned to Port opposite Gold Beach. Sighted target which opened fire. Started bombardment - target destroyed. Heavy bombardment all along coast - whole area under heavy shelling. 0705 Anchored. Rocket ships in position and opened fire 17 minutes before H-Hour. Smoke and Noise. Assault craft went in at 0725, all ships bombarding.



This photo was extracted from a BBC documentary on TV and shows HMS Ajax firing a broadside at the gun battery at Longues, above Gold Beach, in the early hours of D-Day morning!

Extract from official Report: *Off Gold Beach, Normandy coast for D-day assault. AJAX was the first ship to open fire on D-day and partially destroyed her first target, a battery of 6" guns at Longues in 8 minutes - 114 X 6" shells at 12,000 yards, direct hits through two of the of the 4 x 5.9" gun ports) It took another 2 hours to completely silence the whole battery of guns.*

Site of the Gun Battery was rediscovered in 1986 – and is now a tourist attraction and Monument to D-Day.

Noise intense, aircraft bombing shore defences, all ships bombarding, landing craft fitted with rocket launchers blasting off, Amazing scenes of action. Yanks to the right, us to the left. Day wore on, towns beings shelled, Saw tankers, LCTs going up in smoke. Americans having difficulties on Omaha beach. .2000 shifted berth in shore for night. Defence watch. Listened to the news – funny to think we were actually here! Night Action Stations 2130. 2nd Degree. Had Middle Watch so turned in. 2315 woken by explosion. Whole ship rocking, thought we'd been hit. Action Stations - learned how a plane passed low overhead. Dropped bombs midships, landed 10 yards astern. Ideal night for planes. Moon. Low clouds. JU88 passed low overhead and dropped bombs.

We opened fire with everything. HMS Emerald appeared hit. Another near miss on Ajax port bow, terrific flash, blinded and doubled up, thought hit. Terrific explosions due to shallow water. Heavy flack of all descriptions coming from all round. Marvellous Brocks show. Many bombs dropped on shore and in water. Amazing sight. 2325 raid over. Shifted berth again. Emerald OK, we don't know where hit. Lots of activity during Middle watch. Argonaut opened fire again at unidentified plane. Big fires burning ashore. Silhouetting landing craft. Flares and many coloured explosions. Many unidentified planes in the area but till now no more bombs"

(This is the end of my diary notes.)

My Journal tells me that on the morning of 9th June we dashed back to Plymouth as had fired all ammunition and needed to load more, and we were back in Normandy the same night! ! It seems as though there were air raids most nights though none on a large scale, and by June 11th the coast in the area of 'Gold' had been secured by the army and we moved along the coast to 'Sword' Beach opposite Ouistreham. The army were having difficulty in taking the town of Caen and we supported them by shelling all and every target from gun batteries to tanks, or even German infantry. We watched as our own bombers carried out raids - some being shot down. The German defence of Caen held up the advance inland and the town was eventually completely destroyed before it was captured.

We left Normandy on the 21st June and docked in Portsmouth where we had a partial refit, new gun barrels fitted, etc. Had 7 days leave and strange to return to comparative peace of home. But it was the time of the V1 pilotless bombs and they were a little disconcerting. Interestingly we had heard them go overhead in Normandy but didn't know what they were - they made a noise like a lawnmower. The engine would cut out, there would be a few seconds of silence before a shattering explosion. It brought back memories of the 'exciting' days of the Battle of Britain and the Blitz in the Summer and Autumn of 1940 - but that's another story!! After the noise of Normandy, and indeed during the Blitz, stress levels were high and any unexpected noise made me start!

**Minutes of the 48th Annual General Meeting of the
HMS AJAX and RIVER PLATE VETERANS ASSOCIATION
Held at The King Charles Hotel, Gillingham on Thursday 3rd October 2013
The agenda had been published in the September 2013 Newsletter**

The meeting was convened following the 48th annual Memorial Service held at 10.30 a.m. at the nearby St George's Centre, Chatham Maritime, Chatham with the following present:

Peter Danks, Chairman & Secretary; Alf Larkin, Treasurer; Judi Collis, Membership Secretary; Malcolm Collis, Archivist; Dennis Talbot; Cliff Hoppé; Fred Coates; Brandon Hewett; John Garrard; Ron Carr; Roy Turner; June Turner; Kenneth Byram; Vic Wilson; Jo Wilson; Bob Adams; Anne Adams; John Hitchin; Doug Harris; Paul Byrne; Peter King; Glyn Seagrave; Peter Parker.

Item 1 Chairman's Opening remarks

The Chairman welcomed members who were attending their first AGM and hoped they had enjoyed meeting members at the dinner on Wednesday evening. He wished to record a vote of thanks to the Committee for their work and support during a busy year. Updates on key items will be covered during the meeting.

Item 2 Apologies

Apologies had been received from the following:

Stephen Harwood; Basil Trott; Jim Smith; John Dooley; Norman Gifford; Clive Sharplin; Ian Wright; Richard Dalzeil; Mike Fox; Bill Smail; Richard Llewellyn; David Humpage; Karen Skilling, Barry Clutton

The following had attended the reunion but were unable to make the AGM: Reg & Estelle Dolby; Margaret Lees; Francis Empson; Nigel Masters; Mike Turner.

No further apologies were received from the floor.

Item 3 Minutes from 47th AGM held on Thursday 4th October 2012

The previous minutes had been circulated in the December 2012 Newsletter and also made available at this AGM. No reports of inaccuracy had been received.

Roy Turner proposed that the minutes as recorded be adopted as a true record of what then took place and this proposition was seconded by John Hitchen and carried by those members present on that occasion.

Item 4 Matters Arising

Item 10 – the fund raising letter had been sent out with some significant responses that had swelled the memorial fund, although others were still outstanding. With regard to enquiring with the Sea Scouts, Malcolm Collis explained that following initial enquiries he had concluded that the considerable effort involved and the likely returns wouldn't justify the time involved. Roy Turner, who raised this matter at the last AGM, advised he would pursue this matter locally.

Item 13 – Navy News article regarding the name Ajax; the Chairman had written to Navy News and an apology was published in a following edition.

There were no other matters arising.

Item 5 Treasurer's Report

The Treasurer circulated a copy of the 2013 accounts (with a comparison to the 2012 accounts), duly Audited and Certified correct by the Independent Examiner, Commander Chris Rose (Squadron Supply Officer on Ajax). The accounts will appear in the December 2013 Newsletter. The Treasurer ran through the accounts.

Once again, despite the fact that the production and circulation of the Newsletters alone exceeded the individual subscription income, the Association funds, as of 31st August, were still healthy with: £733.10 in the Current Account; £3505.03 in the Business Instant Access Account; and £12548.14 in the Memorial Fund Account.

There were no questions from the floor and Dennis Talbot proposed that the accounts be adopted and this was seconded by Paul Parker and carried by members present.

The Treasurer advised that there was no requirement to raise the current £10 subscriptions, payable on **1st January** for the ensuing year so it was proposed to keep the subscriptions at £10. This was agreed. Members were reminded that the Gift Aid scheme also applied to subscriptions and were requested to complete a form if they had not already.

The Treasurer also stated that it was easier for subscriptions to continue to go the Membership Secretary as

membership records could be updated and membership paperwork sent out to members as they renewed. The Membership Secretary's paying-in book and the memorial fund paying-in book had been sent the Treasurer at end of financial year and made available to the Auditor when auditing the accounts, as previously recommended.

The Membership Secretary reminded members of the family membership subscription of £15 where Newsletters are shared or sent electronically.

The Treasurer stated that there are still plenty of ties available and also has available polo shirts, sweat shirts and cagoules (Contact Alf at this stage). Malcolm also advised that he would get round to setting up an on-line shop through the website to hopefully sell to a wider audience and produce memorial fund income.

Item 6a Archivist Update

The website www.hmsajax.org continues to be very popular with over 42,000 visits to date and although the enquiries had slowed somewhat they still took up some considerable time researching. Various avenues such as Facebook and other forums are used to encourage more members.

Item 6b Membership Secretary Update

The Membership Secretary thanked all members and guests attending this reunion, memorial service and now the AGM stating that all are equally as important to keep the association moving forward into the future.

Our membership this year has had some sad losses with many very important faces at our previous reunions noticeably absent this year.

The Membership Secretary advised that we have 10 new Associate members this year mainly from website enquiries to Malcolm. Most of these joined thanks to Malcolm answering their questions about relatives but some are not so enthusiastic about subsequent years, so we need to work on that. We have 11 new frigate members, several here for this reunion, well done and please keep recruiting.

Our membership to date is:

Members – 74; of which 33 are Frigate members

Life Members - 7

Honorary members - 5 from Town of Ajax

Associates – 58; including 8 family members

Total membership of 144

The Annual Subscriptions have steadily arrived during the year, but we have got a bit out of step with several new members joining mid season and the knock on effect of late payers. The Membership Secretary thanked everyone for continuing to support us, especially this year, with the very generous support we have had for the memorial fund. It's much easier if the subs come during the first few months of the year, either by standing order, bank transfer, the subscribe button or paypal on the website or a cheque sent to the Membership Secretary, made payable to the Association.

The Membership Secretary advised that the membership cards that Ken Jones used to give out are starting to fill up and she only had a few spares. As many people are paying over the internet the question was do we wish to continue with them? After some debate it was agreed that a small number would be printed, following redesign by the Membership Secretary for issue to those who requested them as there was some limited use for them.

A few members were present as a result of Facebook and the Membership Secretary encouraged them to get together and recruit others.

Subscriptions

Regrettably much of the Committee members' time is taken up with chasing non-paying members with a lot of effort, not to mention cost, exerted for little return.

A reminder that the annual subs are due in January and we request they are paid by March at the latest.

Item 6c Newsletter Editor Update

Peter Danks sought members' views on whether the number of editions should be reduced to 3 a year as very little material was being submitted by members making it a considerable effort to produce 16 pages. It was agreed to remain with 4 but reduce the number of pages to 12 accordingly. The Editor particularly requested material from the ladies present.

Item 7 Election of Officials

The Chair handed over to the Archivist for this item. This had been included within the Agenda published in the September 2013 Newsletter and in the absence of any other nominations the Archivist proposed that the following officials, duly proposed and seconded, be declared elected:

Chairman – Peter Danks. Proposed by Mike Turner and seconded by Kenneth Byram.

Secretary/Newsletter Editor – Peter Danks. Proposed by Kenneth Byram and seconded by Mike Turner.

Treasurer – Alf Larkin. Proposed by Fred Coates and seconded by Mike Fox.

Archivist – Malcolm Collis. Proposed by Fred Coates and seconded by Karen Skilling.

Membership Secretary – Judi Collis. Proposed by Karen Skilling and seconded by Fred Coates.

It was proposed by Roy Turner that the officials be elected en block and this was seconded by Dennis Talbot and carried by those present. Peter Danks resumed the Chair.

Roy Turner, in the absence of Mike Turner, paid tribute to the committee members and all the hard work they put into running the Association. The Chairman said these remarks were much appreciated.

Item 8 Events in 2014

Members had been kept updated via the Newsletters but the Chairman ran through the proposed 2014 events. Malcolm gave an update on the memorial dedication at the NMA on Saturday 12th April 2014 as did Alf for the Ajax visit in June. He outlined options for accommodation indicating that the Garden Hilton was probably the best option although one member thought the Super 8 was good value. He was still investigating flight options. He also requested that those intending visiting let him know. Peter gave a brief explanation on the 13th December luncheon. The question of travel insurance for the older/infirm members was raised as it was considered that this may be an insurmountable problem. However, several insurance companies do specialist travel insurance and this would be circulated in due course.

Item 9 Fund Raising – Memorial

Malcolm Collis updated members on the current position regarding fund raising and was pleased to announce that funds were coming in very nicely and that there should be sufficient to fund ancillary matters such as travel for veterans and the like. Besides the funding of the memorial itself there would also be ongoing costs that need to be factored in to future budgets.

Item 10 Changes to Constitution

No requests for changes had been received.

Item 11 Date & Venue for 2014 Reunion

It was proposed that the 2014 AGM be moved to coincide with the December luncheon at Portsmouth rather than have too many events in 2014 and this was agreed. It should be possible to hold the AGM prior to the lunch – further details to be finalised. Some thought may be given to arranging a coach trip to the Arboretum for those unable to attend the unveiling; this would be of interest possibly to any visitors from Canada.

Item 12 2015 – 50th Year of our Association

The Chairman highlighted the fact that 2015 would see the 50th anniversary of the Association and sought ideas how we would mark this event.

Item 13 Any other business

Leander Class Association – the Chairman explained this Association and sought views on the need for us to be members. Malcolm Collis advised that he had not seen any emails for a considerable time from the organisers and in his view it had died a death. There were no volunteers to represent us and the matter was considered closed.

Alf Larkin produced examples of the merchandise available.

There being no other business the Chair thanked Members for attending the AGM and closed the meeting at 1235 hrs.

HMS Ajax and River Plate Veterans Association
Balance Sheet Year ending 31st August 2013

<u>Income</u>	2013	2012	<u>Expenditure</u>	2013	2012
Subscriptions	£ 990.91	£ 1145.60	Printing	£ 638.55	£ 652.18
Donations	£ 787.60	£ 710.00	Stationery/Postage	£ 468.98	£ 492.69
Miscellaneous	£ 51.44	£ 85.52	Miscellaneous	£ 1624.65	£ 1627.68
Raffle	£ 450.00	£ 172.50			
Excess spend	£ 452.23	£ 658.93			
Over income					
Total	<u>£ 2732.18</u>	<u>£ 2772.55</u>		<u>£ 2732.18</u>	<u>£ 2772.55</u>

Current Assets Cash at Bank £4238.13 Less cheque 62 £110.68 £ 4127.45
Balance brought Forward £4579.68 Less excess expenditure £452.23 £ 4127.45

Additional Assets Memorial Fund £ 1258.14
77 Ties @ £6 £ 462.00
Deposit paid for 75th Anniversary Lunch £ 250.00

Miscellaneous Expenditure

£500 Donation transferred to the Memorial A/C
£250 Deposit for 75th Anniversary Lunch
£394.70 Last year's reunion Dinner Wine. AGM Coffee and Sandwiches
£352.55 Mileage claims and lunch for 2 Committee Meetings
£50.40 Mileage claim Standard Bearer Joe Collis Funeral
£50.00 Maritime Club Deposit now refunded
£27.00 RNZN Officer's Dinner 2012 Reunion

*Accounts audited
+ found correct.*

Chris Rose

*(See HMS AJAX
1973-74!)*

*A. Larkin
Treasurer*



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