



# Merchant Navy Association (Wales) Newsletter



*Happy New Year Shipmates.  
Best wishes and plain sailing to you  
and yours for 2015*

Another busy year has ended. Apart from our “usual” events such as our services down Cardiff Bay, Barry, Swansea and Newport; Armed Forces Day in Cardiff, Remembrance Field of Crosses, National Remembrance Service in Cardiff, Welsh Festival of Remembrance in St. Davids Hall Cardiff etc., we were invited by the Grangetown Local History Society to attend their World War One 100 Years Anniversary event in Grange Gardens. We were also invited to join the Organising Committee of the Battle of Jutland celebrations to take place in 2016. Some of us were fortunate to pay visits to HMS Dragon, HMS Duncan and HMS Somerset during their visits to Cardiff. We were also requested by The Royal British Legion to provide four MN Standard Bearers for a short service which was held at the Cardiff Arms Park prior to the start of a rugby match between The Combined Services Ladies team and the Cardiff Blues Ladies. John, Tony and Des Farnham duly obliged backed up by Newport MNA. That must have been a first. What will 2015 bring I wonder.



Douglas May, Chairman, Bristol Branch, Peter Rees, Ken Armstrong and Joe Norton of Barry  
at the Newport Branch Memorial Service in November.

I am sure there are many of you out there with a story to tell. Do your family and friends know what you have done during your life?? Especially your time at sea. I get many requests asking to provide information on fathers and brothers who served at sea but left no details behind. Write it down before your history is lost. Start by sending me articles, stories or photographs like Joe Norton did on page 3, and with your permission I'll put them in our Newsletters and on our website. You are their link with the past. Don't let your memories and history be lost to your family and friends.



### THE USHAKOV MEDAL

On Monday 11th August 2014 our President, Commodore Oliver Lindsay, (third from left front row) attended the Russian Embassy in London where he was invested with the Ushakov Medal by the Russian Ambassador.



On Wednesday 3rd December 2014 Shipmate Con Connelly attended a presentation ceremony at City Hall, Cardiff, accompanied by our Chairman and Secretary, to receive his Ushakov Medal from Sergey Nalobin of the Russian Embassy. There was some delay when the presentation team discovered that they had the wrong medals, but the correct medals were soon delivered and the presentation carried out. Well done to all of the 67 veterans who attended.

Congratulations to Oliver and Con. Details of the medal can be found on our web site.

## A VOYAGE ON THE S.S. BARON GRAHAM

BY JOE NORTON

I signed on the S.S. Baron Graham as Galley Boy at Greenock on the 28th July 1943. After discharging a cargo of sugar we went up to Glasgow where we spent some time getting extra guns fitted including a "pillar box". This was a dome shaped contraption with ten rockets either side. After leaving the Clyde our next stop was Penarth. Shore leave was forbidden, but being local, myself and another Barry boy were allowed to go home for a few hours. This was appreciated except for the fact that I had to walk from Barry to Penarth as the last bus was full. In Penarth we loaded army trucks on deck, plus their drivers and mechanics. We sailed for the Solent where we spent 14 days swinging around the hook, but we did get one night ashore. Early one evening we noticed a lot of activity. Naval tenders were approaching the 14 cargo ships which had now assembled. They were carrying DEMS gunners to man the extra guns that had been fitted.



Later in the evening we raised the hook and set off in convoy with a naval escort. We were ordered to muster on the forward well deck at 7.30 p.m. when we were told that we were to sail along the French coast in the hope that the Germans would send out their planes to attack us and the RAF would come and shoot the Germans down. Fortunately nothing happened. At the time we had over 100 people onboard as did the other ships. What carnage could have occurred. We headed for Swansea where we unloaded the trucks and excess gunners and drivers. We spent several days in Swansea loading coal and then sailed for Milford Haven to join a convoy.

Eventually we left Milford and headed off into the unknown. After several days we developed engine trouble and had to drop out of the convoy. One of the escorts circled us while the problem was being sorted and we then rejoined the convoy. Unfortunately we had to drop out again but this time the escort was not so friendly. The message was "the convoy must go on. Goodbye and good luck". Things were going alright until one morning when a plane was spotted approaching from head on. It was flying low from fore to aft and the Swastika and the German Cross told us that it was not a friend. We could actually see the crew pointing at us. It flew astern of us, turned and started its bombing run. It was then that our gunners opened up with the rockets. The plane veered to port and disappeared. It did not return. We sent an attack signal and a British destroyer met us and escorted the ship to Gibraltar. We waited to join another convoy at Gib and ended up in Algiers.

After a week or more in Algiers we set off for Gib for orders. Several days at anchor here, no shore leave, then a convoy of 4 ships set off for Huelva in Spain. Quite pleasant steaming up the Spanish coast within the sight of land. Had a nice time in Huelva especially in the "pastelaria" (cake shop). Then it was back to Gib to wait for a homeward bound convoy.

After three attempts we were finally on our way home. Unfortunately we were picked up by a spotter plane. Our escort was reinforced, but three days after being sighted by the Spotter plane, the alarm bells rang and the heavy mob arrived. There was a near miss when a bomb hit the water between us and a corvette. A ship in the centre lane was hit and started to burn. Luckily the crew managed to fight it. As dusk descended the raid ended. Things were getting back to normal when the alarm bells sounded again. The U-boats had arrived. The all clear was given a couple of hours later. I read a report of the incident which stated that the convoy was attacked by 25 aircraft. One merchant ship was sunk, an escort vessel damaged and 2 U-boats were also reported sunk.

We eventually arrived in the UK, discharged our cargo in the North East and sailed to Barry for paying off. This was my only taste of war action thank goodness. My war days finished when the S.S. Empire Don, on which I was serving, arrived at Genoa on VE Day.

## CROSSED THE BAR

The following members have crossed the bar since the July Newsletter



*Mr John L. Evans of Coychurch, age 79  
July 2014*



*Mr. Colston Hicks of Cardiff, age 93  
September 2014*

**We will remember them**

## Dates for your Diary

**Regular meetings** are held on the second Wednesday of every month at the Canton Liberal Club, Cowbridge Road East, Cardiff, commencing at 14.30.

The Holocaust Memorial Day will be held at 1100 on Tuesday 27 January 2015 at City Hall, Cardiff

**Our Annual General Meeting will be held on Wednesday 13th May 2015 at the Canton Liberal Club, Cardiff, commencing at 14.30. This is an opportunity for those wishing to serve on the Committee, to put their names forward.**

**Nominations should reach the Secretary on or before the 22nd April, 3 weeks prior to the AGM.**

You will be notified of other events as dates and times become available. Notification will be provide at our regular meetings, via email (if you are on line) and via our web site [www.mnawales.org.uk](http://www.mnawales.org.uk)

## ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTIONS

The Membership Secretary reminds all members that subscriptions for the year 2014/2015 are now due. The annual subscription is **£10.00**. In accordance with our Articles of Association, any member who is three years in arrears, may be removed from the membership list.

Please advise the Secretary of any sickness or bereavement which may come to your notice.