



NOA'S ARK

Journal of the Naval Officers' Association of Southern Africa

Johannesburg Branch

1 March 2018

Dedicated to the Merchant Navy sailors who lost their lives delivering vital supplies during WW2



Workhorse of the seas in WW2 – a Liberty Ship



WHAT ARE WE LOOKING AT?



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WATCH & STATION BILL



Who's who in NOASA?

PATRON

H.R.H. The Prince Phillip, The Duke of Edinburgh, KG, KT, OM, GBE, AC, QSO, PC, FRS

VICE PATRONS

Vice-Admiral M S Hlongwane SAN MMS, MMB Chief of the South African Navy

Vice Admiral R C Simpson-Anderson, SSAS, SD, SM, MMM

Vice Admiral R J Mudimu, CLS, DMG, SM, MMS, MMM, MMB

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ADMIRAL'S FLAG HOIST



What's that signal from the Admiral saying?

Brief History of the Naval Officers Association of South Africa.

The following brief history of the Naval Officers' Association of South Africa written by our Honorary Life Vice President Captain (Navy) IC (Mac) Anderson (Rtd).

After the First World War volunteers who joined the Royal Navy for the duration of the war were demobbed as reservists and formed an association of Naval Officer Reservists in the UK.

Come the Second World War and volunteers from various Commonwealth Countries volunteered to join the Royal Navy. It is interesting to note that of the South African contingent 65% came from the Transvaal area as opposed to coastal areas.

After the war when they returned and were demobbed a meeting was held at the old Carlton Hotel in Johannesburg and the Naval Officers' Association of South Africa was formed in 1946. It is interesting that a separate association was formed in Welkom with 37 members being Naval engineers from SA and UK who found employment as mining engineers.

Separate associations were subsequently founded in Durban, Port Elizabeth Cape Town and Simon's Town.

Similar Associations were formed in most Commonwealth Countries. Mac Anderson visited the Association in the UK in Hill Street and made use of their Wardroom and had meals in their Dining Room. There he met members from New Zealand and some years later he was able to visit the NOA Wardroom in Auckland.

Lieutenant Richard Lewis, one of our former members, who emigrated to Canada joined an Association there and went on to become their President.

Although each Association is an autonomous body the one commonality is that they all commemorate the Battle of Trafalgar in October each year.

The object of the Naval Officers' Association when it was established in Johannesburg 70 years ago was to establish a voluntary organisation to maintain and foster among members the spirit of comradeship engendered by service in the Allied Navies of World War II.

A Charitable Fund was established by the NOA in Johannesburg as a registered fund-raising organisation to raise and collect moneys to aid former seafarers who have fallen on hard times, which it still does to this day.

In 2018 Johannesburg has 114 members, Simon' Town (Cape Town) 200 and Durban 12, a total of 326.

*Rear Adm(JG) L M Bakkes SD, SM, MMM, JCD (Rtd)
President, Johannesburg Branch
Naval Officers' Association of Southern Africa*



FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK



To say that war is cruel, is to state the obvious. However, there are aspects of war which do not always capture the public imagination as they should. One such example is the Merchant Navy sailors who sacrificed their lives during WW2 so that others may have a better future.

Under the section 'Looking Astern' on page 7 I've tried to rectify this shortcoming by referencing the book 'Battle for the North Atlantic'.

It's not that they were never given recognition but for many reasons they never really came under the public spotlight as they deserved. Perhaps they were just too mundane and unexciting when compared with their fellow sailors manning dashing destroyers, massive battleships and many other vessels of war.

I hope that what is on offer on page 7 will partly rectify that failing by our broader society.

In the opening chapters of that book I was reminded of the incredible bond which exists between all sailors, irrespective of nation, gender, colour or creed. It's what sets sailors apart in many ways – the sea – which can be gracious and beautiful or chillingly wild and dangerous. Their mutual respect for the sea has meant behaviour patterns not always witnessed in other theatres of war.

In the book during the early days of WW2 it records how U-boat skippers surfaced after sinking a ship to assist victims in the water. Hitler in fact, had decreed that U-boats observe the international rules of prize warfare. This meant the U-boats sacrificed their greatest assets – surprise and stealth. Instead of torpedoing a passing ship while submerged, or at least while the target was unaware, the U-boat commanders had to make their attacks on the surface and secure the safety of the merchant ship's crew. Ships flying neutral flags were out of bounds. Hitler's intent had been to avoid antagonising neutrals like the United States. Unfortunately, the realities of war would reveal otherwise.

On the first evening of the war Oberleutnant Fritz-Julius Lemp commanding U-30 sighted and sank the *Athenia* carrying 1 103 civilian passengers from England to the U S. One hundred and eighteen people perished. The cruelty of war had made its mark as the world ranted and raged.

Two days after the *Athenia* went down Gunther Prien's U-47 encountered a freighter in the Bay of Biscay. Observing the rules of prize warfare, Prien ran the ship down on the surface. A shot across the bow failed to halt the vessel, so U-47's gunners put six shells into her. As the crew abandoned their ship, Prien cruised alongside the lifeboats and spotting a wounded man, ordered his crew to give him a shot of brandy. When a Norwegian steamer appeared, Prien signalled it and asked the captain to take his target's crew aboard. After the Norwegians had fished everyone out of the water, Prien delivered the coup de grace on the hapless freighter with a couple of well-placed torpedoes.

Another incident took place off the West African coast in September 1942 when U-156 sank the SS *Laconia* carrying almost 2 000 civilians, Allied soldiers and Italian prisoners of war. U-506 surfaced to assist the rescue efforts of U-156. Sadly, the cruelty of war soon put an end to that when a patrolling U S Army Air Force B24 aircraft attacked the two U-boats on the surface.

This incident caused Admiral Doenitz to issue what was known as the Laconia Order – he forbade his crews from further rescue attempts. This put the seal on the idea of a gentleman's war which Hitler had hoped to fight in the Atlantic. It turned irretrievably ugly and cruel.

I've devoted considerable space to those merchant navy sailors of WW2 and I hope I've shown some balance in what I've presented. The main thing is that we – generations later – should not forget their sacrifice.

Yours aye

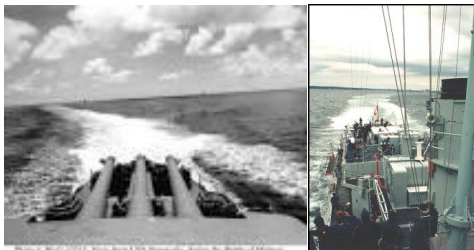
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LOOKING ASTERN



A glimpse into the past.

The vital role played by the Merchant Navy and its ships' crews during WW2 can never be forgotten. I was inspired to include this short tribute after reading a fascinating book entitled, 'Battle for the North Atlantic' by John R Bruning. It's an excellent, coffee table publication brought from the US by my granddaughter when she was over there late last year. I strongly recommend it if it's available locally.

There's no better start to this story than to quote the Introduction from the book.....

"They fought and died in desperate battles played out in the most unforgiving place on the planet. Some wore their nation's uniform, but most were civilians who went to sea in hopes of escaping the Great Depression. Instead they found themselves in the middle of a titanic struggle upon which hinged the course of history. By the time the shooting stopped, 3 500 of their ships lay beneath the Atlantic Ocean's grey-green swells.



May Jones, a sixty-eight-year-old British merchant sailor mans a machine gun aboard his ship.

These men fought with outdated equipment in poorly armed ships whose ancient engines wheezed them along at pathetic speeds. When alone, they were easy prey for Axis vessels hunting them. When they succumbed to a submarine-fired torpedo, or a marauding surface raider, they died in horrifying ways. Those who survived to reach the water faced another ordeal. Clinging to bits of wreckage or huddled against the elements in lifeboats, they endured a slow death on the churning seas. Too many watched as friendly ships vanished on the horizon, their captains too fearful of the U-boat menace to risk their rescue. They died of hyperthermia, starvation and dehydration, lost among the bitter seas.



This is their story, told by men who had the courage to ride with them and photograph their crucible. Many of these photographers died in action. Those who survived gave successive generations a tremendous gift. Their willingness to risk everything produced a record of images that, when pieced together, form a vivid mosaic of the war's longest campaign.

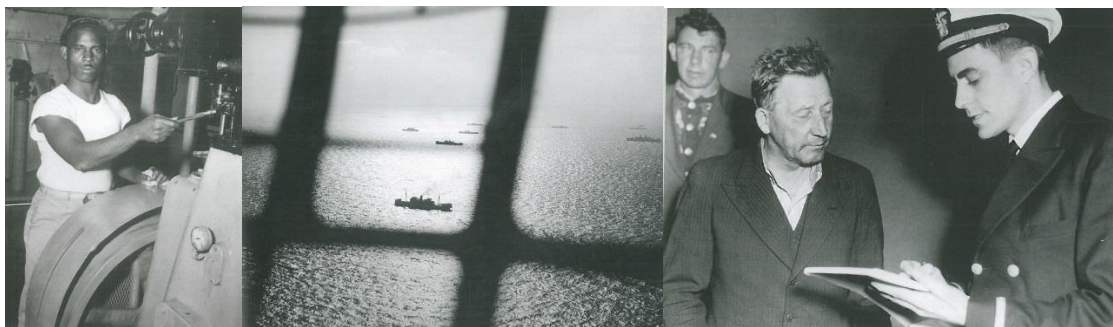
This was a campaign overshadowed by such events as Monty's stand at Alamein, or Patton's race across France. It lingered in the background as Paris fell, England stood alone, and Russia bled. It was all but forgotten by the time of D-Day and the crossing of the Rhine. Yet control of the Atlantic was the foundation for everything that unfolded after 1939. The convoys became the machinery that held the Allied cause together. The Axis came close several times to destroying it but could never deliver a decisive blow.

It was a war of statistics, of tonnage lost, ships constructed, and cargo delivered. In some ways, it was far more mathematically driven than any other aspect of World War II. In that tapestry of indicators, the human element has tended to get lost. Few remember the eighty thousand sailors for whom the cold Atlantic became their grave.

The Allied merchant mariners saved nations, yet history has shafted them. Despite all the ink devoted to World War II, students of the era would be hard pressed to name even one of those civilian warriors. The men who guided the merchant ships across the Atlantic remain the war's faceless martyrs. Without their tenacity, a dark age would have engulfed the Western world, and millions more would have perished. Their blood bought a future for all of us. But when the last shell splash settled, their efforts were ignored by thankless Western governments.



This is their story, told with the images taken by equally anonymous photographers who ranged across this hellish aquatic battlefield side by side with the men who carried home the Allied victory.”



We commemorate the Liberty ships of WW2 and the men who sailed in them with the story of the SS Robert E. Peary – probably the most famous of all the Liberty ships.



History



Name:	SS <i>Robert E. Peary</i>
Namesake:	<u>Robert Peary</u>
Builder:	Permanente Metals Corporation, Yard No. 2, Richmond, California
Laid down:	November 8, 1942
Launched:	November 12, 1942
Sponsored by:	Mrs. James F. Byrnes
Acquired:	November 15, 1942
Commissioned:	November 15, 1942
Decommissioned:	December 1946
Fate:	Scrapped at Baltimore, Maryland, June 1963

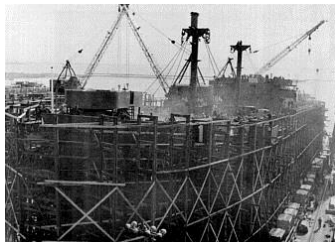
General characteristics

Class and type:	Type EC2-S-C1 Liberty ship
Displacement:	14,245 long tons (14,474 t)
Length:	441 ft 6 in (134.57 m) <u>o/a</u> 417 ft 9 in (127.33 m) <u>p/p</u> 427 ft (130 m) <u>w/l</u>
Beam:	57 ft (17 m)
Draft:	27 ft 9 in (8.46 m)
Propulsion:	Two oil-fired boilers Triple-expansion steam engine 2,500 hp (1,900 kW) Single screw
Speed:	11 <u>knots</u> (20 km/h; 13 mph)
Range:	20,000 nmi (37,000 km; 23,000 mi)
Capacity:	10,856 t (10,685 long tons) deadweight (DWT)
Crew:	81 ¹¹
Armament:	Stern-mounted <u>4 in (100 mm) deck gun</u> Variety of <u>anti-aircraft guns</u>

SS Robert E. Peary was a Liberty ship which gained fame during World War II for being built in a shorter time than any other such vessel. Named after Robert Peary, an American explorer who claimed to have been the first person to reach the geographic North Pole, she was launched on November 12, 1942 just 4 days, 15 hours and 29 minutes after the keel was laid down.

The SS *Robert E. Peary* was built at the Permanente Metals Corporation No. 2 Yard in Richmond, California and was the 47th ship built at the yard. The record set in her construction was the result of a competition between shipyards to see which could build a Liberty ship the fastest. The Oregon Shipbuilding Corporation had built another Liberty ship, the SS *Joseph N. Teal*, in only ten days between September 13 and September 23, 1942. The yard's owner, Henry J. Kaiser (who also owned the Richmond Shipyards), was asked by a reporter if it could have been done quicker. He replied that it could have been constructed in eight days but had been delayed to allow President Franklin D. Roosevelt to attend.

Roosevelt agreed to a proposal to build a ship in half the time. To meet the deadline, the Richmond Shipyard prefabricated as much of the vessel as possible at its No. 2 Yard and pre-positioned the sections to enable the workers to assemble it with maximum efficiency. The keel was laid at 12:01 am on November 8, 1942. The rest of the ship was built from prefabricated 250-ton sections with the engines already in place. The bottom shell unit was installed first, followed by the inner-bottom unit to support the boiler, engine and pump. The boilers were put in place by mid-morning, followed by transverse bulkheads and the shaft tunnel. The upper deck was completed on the second day, with the installation of the lower forepeak, more bulkheads and the fantail. The masts, derricks and superstructure were installed on the third day. During the final day the wiring, welding and painting was completed along with the installation of the forward gun platform and the inner stack. She was launched at 3:27 pm on November 12 after around 250,000 individual parts weighing 14,000,000 lb (6,400,000 kg) had been assembled. After 26 minutes of speeches, Mrs. James F. Byrnes, the wife of the head of Roosevelt's Economic Stabilization Office, christened the ship and it was sent down the slipway into San Francisco Bay. It was delivered for service on November 15, setting an additional record of 7 days, 14 hours and 32 minutes from laying the keel to delivery.



The record speed of the construction was a propaganda effort intended to show that the United States could produce ships faster than they could be sunk. Normally, the Permanente yard took an average of about 50 days to build a Liberty ship. In fact, though, it could not realistically be done much faster as there was not enough steel or capacity to build them at such a pace. The ship was referred to as a "stunt ship", though Henry Kaiser referred to it as an "incentive ship" because of the boost that it provided to his workers' morale. Nonetheless, the extreme rapidity of the *Robert E. Peary's* construction illustrated how successfully US shipyards had adopted methods of mass production that had been pioneered in the motor industry; at the start of the Liberty ship program, the ships took an average of 1.4 million man-hours and 355 days to build, but by 1943 the figures had come down to under 500,000 man-hours (or 57 man years) and an average of 41 days.



The SS *Robert E. Peary* sailed on her maiden voyage on November 22. She was operated by the Weyerhaeuser Steamship Company and first served in the Pacific Theatre, sailing to Noumea, New Caledonia before heading onwards to Guadalcanal. She sailed to the Atlantic Ocean in April 1943 and operated there for the remainder of the war on the convoy routes to Europe, ferrying prisoners of war from North Africa and serving off Omaha Beach on D-Day. She was withdrawn to the Wilmington Reserve Fleet in December 1946 and was scrapped in June 1963 at Baltimore, Maryland.



MAKE A SIGNAL.....



DIARY UPDATES

NOASA AGM 8 June 2018 @ 18:00 in The Wardroom at the Rand Club

NOASA Trafalgar Dinner: Saturday 20 October 2018 at the Country Club Johannesburg (Auckland Park)

TRAFALGAR DINNER 2018

Those readers who have attended in the past can testify that we celebrate this solemn occasion in a fitting naval manner. This year – as in the past - there's a distinguished line-up of guest speakers to enhance the stature of the evening and ensure that the immortal memory of Nelson lives on.



Invitations will be sent soon, and we urge you to respond at your earliest convenience.

NB Payments for the dinner will close on 5 October 2018



See you there!

MAKE A SIGNAL! By Capt Jack Broome D.S.C. R.N.



BRAVO ZULU

From the distant past.....

“On 1st September 1895, Admiral Jackson, who saw great possibilities in wireless telegraphy, met Signor Marconi, who was producing practical results from experiments in that direction. On 7th May 1898, in Admiral Jackson’s presence, the sceptics were severely shaken when Marconi tied an insulated wire to a flagstaff at Bournemouth into which he pumped morse messages which were received at Alum Bay, Isle of Wight, 14 miles away.

This achievement must have been a setback to those interested in another line of research at this time. *The Handbook of Homing Pigeons for Naval Purposes*, published the same year, began confidently by saying: “Now that the conveyance of messages by homing pigeons for naval and military purposes has become an essential part of war preparation in all European countries....”

Times have changed! Ed’s comment

SCRAP LOG



From ship to ship:

Please send your technical expert to see our foremost gun.

Reply:

Our technical expert can see your foremost gun from here.

From C-in-C Mediterranean to Cardiff:

Your confidential book officer is to report at my office for destruction.

A cruiser was leading some destroyers on an operation against enemy shipping. After much bad weather and no navigational fixes, they found themselves not where they were expected to be and almost certainly in a minefield.

From Cruiser to Flotilla Leader:

What do you consider is our position other than precarious?

From Flag Officer, Gibraltar:

Small round object sighted 180 degrees 5 miles from Europa point. Probably mine.

From Flag Officer Force H:

Certainly not mine.

H.M.S. Ark Royal on first emerging for sea trials circa 1938, passed another of H.M. ships:

From Ark Royal to passing ship:

How do I look?

Reply;

Go back to Loch Ness



THE LAST WORD - AT LAST!



Alcohol

A man ran into a pub and shouted, "Who's the strongest man in this bar?"

A huge fellow got up and said, "I am."

"Good", said the first, "then come outside and help me push my truck."

Bed-time stories

At 8 you take her to bed to tell her a story.

At 18 you tell her a story and take her to bed.

At 28 you don't need to tell her a story to take her to bed.

At 38 she tells you a story and takes you to bed.

At 48 you tell her a story to avoid taking her to bed.

At 58 you stay in bed to avoid her story.

At 68 if you take her to bed, that'll be quite a story.

At 78 if you can get out of bed, that'll be another story!

Bus ride

Two men were sitting in a packed bus when a beautiful young lady walked down the aisle looking for a seat. She was wearing quite a lot of make-up, with red lips, rosy cheeks and blue eye shadow. Without a seat, she hung on to the strap in the centre of the aisle.

The one man asked the other, "Aren't you going to offer her your seat?"

"No!" replied the other. She looks like a painting and paintings must hang."

Church

Why did God make man before he made woman? Because you always need a rough draft before you make the final copy.

Dinner speeches

Scheduled to make an after-dinner speech the speaker became so nervous during the meal that he slipped out and went home.

"What this country needs is more speakers like that," quipped one of the guests.

Definition

A mother is a person who, seeing there are only four pieces of pie for five people, promptly announces she never did care for pie.

Lawyers

A man phones a law office and says, "I want to speak to my lawyer."

The receptionist replies, "I'm sorry but he died last week."

The next day he phones again and asks the same questions.

The receptionist replies, "I told you yesterday, he died last week."

The next day he phones again and asks to speak to his lawyer.

By this time the receptionist is getting annoyed and replies, "I keep telling you that your lawyer died last week. Why do keep calling?"

The man responds, "Because I just love hearing it."

A few 'Quotable Quotes'

"Being powerful is like being a lady. If you have to tell people you are, you aren't." Margaret Thatcher

"One man with courage makes a majority." Andrew Jackson

"It was the nation and the race dwelling all round the globe that had the lion's heart. I had the luck to be called upon to give the roar." Winston Churchill

"I think there is only one quality worse than hardness of heart and that is softness of head." Theodore Roosevelt, 26th President of the U.S.

Curious things, habits. People themselves never knew they had them. Agatha Christie

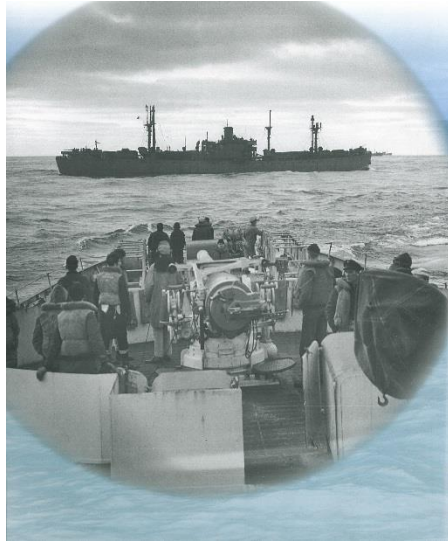
In Brief – short tales from the Sunday Times of 21 January 2018

"No blind eye turned to bid for Nelson flag

A piece of the Union Jack flag believed to be from the flagship of Lord Horatio Nelson's fleet during the Battle of Trafalgar sold for £297 000 (about R5 million) at an auction in London this week.

The item was part of a collection of Nelson memorabilia that was up for sale at auctioneers Sothebys, and included weapons, his grog chest and personal letters. Reuters





Wishing you fair winds and a following sea.

Until next time!

