



## CHAIRMANS CHAT

The Chairman welcomed all present with a Happy New Year Wish to all.

**GUESTS** Our guests included Gary MARSHALL from Glasgow Branch who happened to be staying at UJC and kindly joined us, also WOII Jack RAMSAY the new USM of RMR London.

**News on Members** , Anne Marks shoulder injury was still keeping her confined as was Peter Browns' hip replacement. Paul Hoareworth our member residing in Italy had been confined to hospital for a number of weeks with an unknown cause but has sent his best wishes to the branch. **Frank Bellizzi** now residing in Malta sends New Year Greetings from Malta.. Apologies for absence received from our President who is out of country and **John Brissett**.

**KEN WHITEROD** Ken's funeral is Friday 2<sup>nd</sup> February at Medway Crematorium at 12 noon. A Bugler has been requested.

**Laying up Old Standard** This is in hand we are juggling dates to ensure the best available with refreshments following the service.

**Branch Annual Events** Please see the Notice Board and read your excellent *CityRoyal* it has the branch meeting dates plus some great articles by members and photographs by David Mott. The Editor is Graeme.

**Zeebrugge Dinner** date as published Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> March here at the UJC. It's being organised again by Graeme Golightly who did a splendid job of our last event. The Dinner is free for members and £10 for one guest, additional guests £15ph. If the dinner is oversubscribed we will operate a 'first come first served' basis. Further details of this event will be published in February's *CityRoyal*.

## DATES FOR YOUR DIARIES:

### Next Meeting

**Thursday 8<sup>th</sup> February**  
**1900hrs** – At the Union Jack Club.

**Friday 23<sup>rd</sup>**  
**March 1900 – 22.30hrs**  
Zeebrugge Branch  
dinner at the UJC.

Editor's note:-

If you have any items for '**City Royal**' please email/contact me at:

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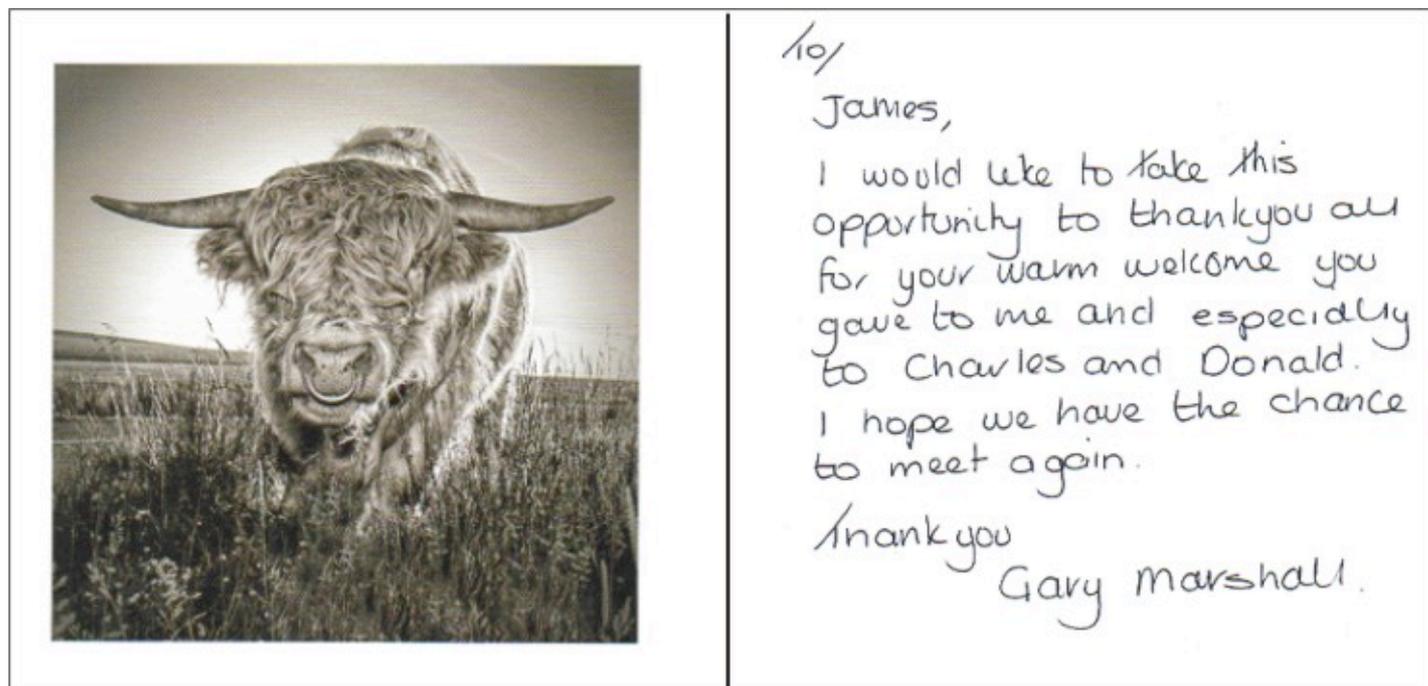
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**Zeebrugge Commemoration 20<sup>th</sup> – 22<sup>nd</sup> April.** Members will appreciate that this is the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary and a landmark event. It is one of the Royal Marines Corps Memorable Dates where two members of the Corps were awarded Victoria Crosses the number of applications to attend is unprecedented. The numbers we can take are restricted both on the coach and at the venues we use whilst there. It is for those reasons that this year we must ensure that FULL ROYAL MARINE members are allocated places before we can take ASSOCIATE members, also from the FULL members we will look to those who have supported the event for many years over those who have never attended. Should there be places left after that then we will look at Associate members who have supported it in the past. That is the only fair way so please bear with us on this special occasion.

### **Visting RMA members**

I received a card this morning from the second RMA Glasgow member to happen upon us at the last meeting, Gary Marshall.

He came and thanked me at the end of the night for the warm welcome he received from our members but as you'll see, he's gone a step further and taken the trouble to send a 'Thank You' card.



The chairman invited questions, there being none he asked all to rise for the Toast

### **'ABSENT COMRADES'**

*David Harris writes:*

## THE ROYAL MARINES



### THE ADMIRALTY ACCOUNT OF THEIR ACHIEVEMENT 1939-1943

#### 11. IN DEFENCE OF THE MERCHANT NAVY SHIPS

*Back to the colours to fight the guns*

Other Royal Marine gunners have been helping to defend merchant ships, whether in convoy or sailing independently, since the beginning of the war. In the early days most of them were pensioners with previous war experience. Some were over 50 years of age. Together with the Royal Fleet Reservists and other naval ratings they made up the organization known as D.E.M.S. (Defensively Equipped Merchant Ships). This was subsequently extended to include Army gunners, which formed the Maritime Regiments of the Royal Artillery.

The first of these marines and naval pensioners to serve in merchant vessels were the only trained gunnery ratings on board and consequently they had to assist in training members of the crew to serve and fire the guns, which ranged from 12- pounders to 6-inch, machine-guns being added as they became available. The guns' crews were composed of officers and upper-deck hands, with volunteers from the engine-room. In ships trading to the East some of the Chinese or Lascars were used as ammunition numbers.

The pensioners signed on as deck hands. They fought the guns of every class of ship in the Merchant Navy and of many which flew the flags of the Allied nations. They fought in the Atlantic, in the convoys to Russia and Malta, on passages to and from the Far East, on the Cape route to the Middle East and in the Indian and Pacific Oceans. Many of them saved their ships against the attacks of Axis aircraft and submarines.



Marine H. Calcott was awarded the B.E.M. for his devotion to duty when one of the Elder Dempster Shipping Company's vessels was chased by an U-boat. She was zig-zagging at about 10 knots in clear weather when a large enemy submarine was seen to be pursuing her on the surface at high speed. At about 10,000 yards the U- boat opened fire without a warning shot. The merchant ships used smoke floats, which seemed to hamper the enemy, so that none of the shells reached its mark. When the U-boat was within 7,000 yards range the steamer hoisted her ensign and Marine Calcott opened fire with the 4-inch gun. The third shot detonated on the U- boat. She dived immediately and was not seen again.

This was one of the many instances of submarines being compelled to abandon a chase through the steadfastness of the D.E.M.S. gunners and their crews. For example, while a vessel of the United Merchants Steamship company was towing to port another which had been put out of action by enemy aircraft, the ships were attacked by a Dornier 17 with bombs and machine gun fire, but drove it off. The master of the towing, in a letter to the Commandant of the Plymouth Division, ,paid tribute to "the sterling ability shown by Marine Chedgey, who not only assisted the Chief Officer in our efforts to connect to the damaged ship, but displayed that cool efficient stability and marksmanship which made the enemy's attack abortive. His steadiness and his control of the gun's crew were a credit to the Corps and but for

his gallantry I am afraid that all our efforts to save the vessel would have failed at the eleventh hour."

Time after time the D.E.M.S. gunners and the crews they have trained have defended their ships by standing to their guns with bombs falling around them, never missing the chance of a shot. Often they have damaged and driven off the aircraft, but there have been occasions when the number has been too many for them and they have had their ship sunk under them, firing their guns to the last.

#### *With the Channel convoys*

Such was the fate of S.S. Terlings, a vessel of 5,000 tons belonging to Messrs Lambert Brothers. She was sailing in a coastal convoy of some 30 vessels, with only a trawler escort Her gunlayer was Marine W.C. Prescott, who had been attendant to King George VI when His Majesty was a midshipman in H.M.S. Cumberland. The crew of her 4-inch gun consisted of English deckhands and Lascar stokers.



As the convoy passed through the Straits of Dover it was shelled by the German batteries on the French coast, without casualties. Off Portland a formation of 38 German dive-bombers came in to attack. They sank two small oilers, then made a concerted attack on the Terlings, dropping of 100 bombs. There were nine direct hits on the engine-room, and three on the bridge. All the engine-room officers were killed and most of the Lascar stokers, also the cook and two cabin boys. Many others were blown into the sea. Marine Prescott, who was subsequently awarded Lloyd's War Medal for Bravery at Sea, thus described his own part in the raid.

"My gun's crew were all machine-gunned by low flying aircraft. Mr. Smith, the Third Officer, had a machine-gun bullet through his neck, but carried on as long as he could. Mr. Ludlow, the Chief Officer (now B.E.M. and L.M.), came aft to help man the gun. The bombs had blown the boilers and bottom out of the ship. She started to sink, but the after part of the deck, where the gun was mounted, was still above water."

"The Lascars behaved marvellously. You treat them fair and they'll treat you fair and 'play with you.' Two of them were killed at the gun, others blown off the gun- platform into the sea. I clung to the gun. The Third Officer was at the training wheel and he clung to that, even after he had been wounded. We fired two more rounds after that. The Chief Officer up-loaded. Then the magazine went underwater. Our ammunition supply was gone and we had no crew. The Captain shouted from a hatchboard in the sea: 'come on, Guns, you can do no more bloody good there.' I then dived into the ditch with the Chief and Third Officer, and got hold of a board. She sank as we left her."

While we were in the water the German aircraft came back and machine-gunned us. I got a bullet in the thigh. Everyone was wounded somewhere. I was in the water about three hours and was picked up by the destroyer Scimitar."

These incidents have been selected from many such actions and the names mentioned are but representative of those marines and corporals, sergeants and colour-sergeants, all of them in middle age, who returned to the sea to place their professional skill at the service of the Merchant Navy. A large number of this Old Guard has now been withdrawn from sea service to train younger generations of naval ratings who are swelling the ranks of D.E.M.S.



## *Winnie and Pooh*

Convoys sailing in home waters have also cause to be grateful to the batteries along the coast. At no point has their support been more effective than that given by the great naval guns, which were mounted near Dover and manned by Royal Marines, as an answer to the long-range batteries across the Straits.

After the occupation of the French coast these German batteries threatened to interfere with “Churchill’s Armada,” as the convoys sailing through the Straits had come to be called, owing to the Prime Minister’s insistence that they must continue to sail the English Channel. To give them protection against the German guns, the Royal Marine Siege Regiment, at the direct insistence of Mr. Churchill, began operations at the end of June, 1940. The first gun, a battleship type, was installed in six weeks, and was appropriately called Winnie, after the Prime Minister. The second, named Pooh, by an obvious association of ideas, followed some weeks later.

These gigantic guns, which have a “super-super” charge of cordite, never fire less than 20 miles. At first they were used for counter-battery work when the convoys were passing through the Straits; later they were employed against coastal targets. They were also held in readiness for defensive purposes in the event of invasion. They have been both shelled and bombed, but without damage of serious casualties.

Winnie and Pooh are static guns, but some distance from them are heavy naval guns on railway mountings called by such names as Piecemaker and Sceneshifter; their range is approximately the same as that of Winnie and Pooh. They are used mainly for cross channel counter-battery work, but could cover targets along the English coast.

When the Siege Regiment was first installed the men were mainly Continuous Service marines. These were gradually withdrawn for sea service as new gunners were trained, and to-day all the officers, and the great majority of the men, are drawn from those who are serving for Hostilities Only



Royal Marines of the same category also man the forts in the Thames Estuary and elsewhere which protect the East Coast shipping from mine laying aircraft. These forts are commissioned as H.M. Ships and are called after the sands on which they stand. They were constructed so that they could be towed out to the required position, whereon the base was submerged. Each fort consists of two concrete towers, 50 feet high from the base, connected by a steel superstructure on which the anti-aircraft guns and equipment are mounted. Fixed to the base is a landing-stage, made of steel joists. The mess decks are in the towers, with a store-room and magazine below, the ammunition being brought up by lift. The forts are connected by telephone to the shore.

All the armament is manned by Royal Marines under R.N.V. officers, with naval ratings for technical duties. The guns and equipment are supplied by the Army, and the forts are in close contact with the R.A.F., thus forming an interesting example of inter-service co-operation. They have accounted for a number of German aircraft.

The Royal Marines also provide their own signallers. There is a story that one rough morning soon after the installation of one of the Thames forts, when the signallers were less efficient than they are now, a destroyer was seen entering the Estuary. A long hoist of flags went up as she approached the fort. Laboriously the marines on duty spelt out the signal. When they had finished, it read;

“And how are the Little Princes in the Tower this morning?”

By the time the Commanding Officer had received it, the destroyer was too far away for him to frame a suitable reply.



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**USEFUL MEN TO HAVE AROUND**

*The Royal Marines have always shown that they have an aptitude for co-operation with others. They are equally proficient, as Kipling pointed out, at paddling their own canoes .....*

“IT IS UPON THE NAVY, UNER THE GOOD PROVIDENCE OF GOD, THAT THE WEALTH, SAFETY AND STRENGTH OF THE KINGDOM DO CHIEFLY DEPEND

***Editor’s note:***

***This Admiralty account of the achievement of the Royal Marines between 1939 and 1943 is re-produced solely for the ‘CITY ROYAL’, the newsletter of the Royal Marines Association, City of London Branch.***

***All spellings and punctuation are those as used in the original publication.***

A very sincere ‘Thank You’ indeed to David for mailing this to me for inclusion into City Royal.