

# THE NEPTUNE ASSOCIATION



## **President**

Commander Nicolas Wright

## **Vice Presidents**

Gillian Wadden, NigelMcPherson, Royden Thomson, Valerie Pennifer, Diana Clayton, Graham Davies

## **SPRING NEWSLETTER No. 39** **March 2021**

### **1. Chairman John McGregor's Introduction**

Since the publication of our Autumn Newsletter events continue to be overtaken by Covid 19 and the re-imposition of 'Lockdown'. It is hoped that the situation will have returned to near normal in time for our annual visit to Alrewas on Saturday, 16<sup>th</sup> October. (Section 2). The planned members' visit to Bletchley Park on 15<sup>th</sup> May 2021 has been cancelled (Section 4). The proposed return visit to Malta commemorating the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the sinking has also been cancelled.

A summary of the results of research since the Spring 2016 Newsletter into the British Intelligence surrounding the laying of the Tripoli minefield is planned for our next Newsletter. The Board of Inquiry into the tragedy was anxious to ensure that copies of "QB10 and QB 11" referring to intelligence on "two minefields" were taken into account in the mission briefing and the Board was assured that both the Captain and Navigating Officer of HMS Neptune were aware of these and copies were aboard the ship. Despite our efforts we have been unable to ascertain the actual content of these two documents or of QBB224 raised after the Neptune tragedy. If any reader has knowledge of the whereabouts of copies or transcripts of QB10, QB11 or QBB 224 we would be greatly indebted if they were to contact us.

I have written an account in Section 5 of the contact with Philip Crennell, son of 'ex-Neptune' Leading Stoker John Crennell, who served in Neptune for 3 ½ years and left 5 months before she sank. His photos and the information on two other Neptune casualties, Stoker John Amor Harrison and Chief ERA Leonard Woodriffe for whom he worked, have been fascinating and invaluable. The death of his good friend Stoker Brian (Chalky) White NZ caused him particular sadness.

In Section 6 I have described how a recent NZ contact, Sarah Thorpe, great niece of casualty Eddy Vazey, has found 14 additional NZ casualty photos from the Auckland Museum website and other NZ publications. Thanks to her detective work, these have been added to the website Roll of Honour. The Auckland Museum website lists every

naval NZ who served in WW2. (I wish we had that for the RN). On our website Roll of Honour we now have 111 photos of the 150 NZs and 445 of the 836 who died in the two ships Neptune and Kandahar.

Extraordinary coincidences continue to occur and one of the strangest stemmed from a message on the website FORUM page from Paul Noon on 22 Oct 2019 that the diary of Harold Dean, describing his service in Neptune as a Midshipman, had been found in a skip in Cheshire. Harold Dean retired as a Commander (Supply) in 1976 and died in 2001. The diary was sent to me and is being typed up by Committee member Caroline Meredith. (Section 7).

My thanks to Rorie Grieve for his article on casualty Lieutenant Frank Woodward. His daughter, Gillian Cross, has been welcomed back as a member and gave permission for the account in Section 9.

In Section 10 I have summarised the chaotic civil war raging in Libya based on an article in The Daily Telegraph of 8 Feb 2021. The news on Saif-al Islam Gadaffi comes from Wikipedia.

## **2. AGM – Saturday, 16<sup>th</sup> October 2021 at the National Memorial Arboretum, Alrewas**

This year December 19<sup>th</sup> sees the 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the loss of HMS Neptune and HMS Kandahar.

To commemorate and remember all our relatives who lost their lives our AGM and meeting will be different this year. We are a unique association and over the years we have become like a family so to allow us more time to get together we have decided to change the format of our usual meeting and to have a hot buffet meal served to allow more time for socializing.

It is planned to start the day earlier than in previous years by meeting at our memorial 1130 am for a Remembrance Service followed immediately at 1215 by the AGM with tea and coffee available. Lunch will then be served at 1330 allowing the rest of the afternoon to socialize.

It would be helpful if we could have some idea at this stage of numbers proposing to attend. Could you therefore please complete the reply slip on page 17. Further details will be announced in the Autumn Newsletter when it will become clearer what Covid restrictions may still be in place and what the NMA can offer.

## **3. December 19<sup>th</sup> 2021 - 80 years since Neptune and Kandahar mined**

On December 19<sup>th</sup> members and friends usually gather at Alrewas and Southsea for informal Remembrance Services. As 2021 is the 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary it is thought it would be appropriate this year to go to Alrewas rather than Southsea. We realise that travel may be a problem for those who normally go to Southsea Naval Memorial so Christine

Pittman-Corner would be grateful for your views as to the best way to proceed. You can contact her on 0203 719 5188 or [cecorner@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:cecorner@yahoo.co.uk).

#### **4. Visit to Bletchley Park - Saturday, 15 th May 2021**

Valerie Pennifer, who kindly organised this visit, has been warned by her contact at Bletchley Park that there are serious limitations on events for the near future. Due to so many uncertainties the committee has reluctantly decided that we should cancel the visit - again! We are very sorry about this and realise that it will be a disappointment to you. However, it is a place which you can visit independently

**Advance Notice** – A visit to Chatham Historic Dockyard with a service at the Chatham Naval Memorial is planned for May 2022.

#### **5. Leading Stoker John Crennell**



The first message from Philip Crennell on the FORUM page on July 7<sup>th</sup> 2020 stated: "Greetings John, My father was John Alfred Crennell Stoker, he served on HMS Neptune from 24th May 1938 to August 1941 when he returned to the UK to undertake a course of some kind. One of his claims to fame he told me was playing rugby against a springbok team at Newlands in the Cape, they were beaten 33-3 with my dad scoring the only try ! I can't remember if it was the Neptune or not he was playing for, do you have any photographs of the Neptune rugby team ? He must have known a lot of the crew who were sadly lost only 17 weeks after he left the ship after being on her for over three years. He went on to earn a DSM at the Normandy landings aboard a Landing Craft and received a Yangtze clasp on his General Service Medal as he was aboard HMS Black Swan during the incident. He was always sorry he never received his Long Service Medal, he had a bust up with a Royal Marine guard on Simon's Town Dockyard gate who wanted to take a bottle of rum from him after a night out in Capetown ! He received 90 days detention at HMS Afrikander but got 12 days off for good behaviour ! Kind regards to all, Phil Crennell."

I replied: "How very good to hear from you about your father Stoker John Alfred Crennell who served in Neptune until May 1941 and left before her tragic sinking in December 1941. How fascinating to hear about him scoring the only try but it is difficult to work out when the match was played. The Neptune Rugby team was very strong with several good New Zealanders playing. I did indeed include an article about the Neptune rugby team in a newsletter written in spring 2011 and will send you a copy. In due course I hope to add a page to our website to show all those 'ex-Neptunes' who left before she sank and thanks for his photo. I have 422 photos of casualties attached to the Roll of Honour. He had a good career with his DSM and Yangtse Black Swan clasp and a shame about his long Service medal!"

Philip sent me his service certificate and I saw that he had been sentenced to 90 days in Detention Quarters at Afrikandar the base at Simon's Town for the 'rum at the gate incident' in 1938 and then returned to Neptune for 3 more years. He spent most of 1940 and 1941 in the ship's motor boats where each had a stoker to look after the engine. In his employment certificate it showed that as the Leading Stoker he was in charge of the Stokers running the engines in Neptune's six motor boats. By the time he retired in July 1953 he had 10 years service as a Stoker Petty Officer

To a remarkable extent the contact with Philip has resulted in a thorough analysis of the Engine Room branch both for Artificers and Stokers. Much of the records of the ERA's are due to the photo album left behind by casualty ERA4 William Wright – see Group Photos page and his photo below. I borrowed the album from his nephew Peter

Wright and copied the photos.



Philip then sent a newspaper cutting which his father had kept concerning the wedding in South Africa on 1 July 1939 of Chief ERA Leonard Woodriffe to Daphne Knipe

which he had attended, saying how sad he was that Leonard died when Neptune sank. Leonard and Daphne had moved to Portsmouth before Neptune was at Chatham for refit and had a son born in Portsmouth on 26 December 1941 - Graham Richard Knipe Woodriffe who may still be alive living in England or South Africa. Investigating those mentioned in the cutting were several more casualties whose photos are on the website Roll of Honour - Rev'd Thomas Harris who conducted the service also in the rugby team, Chief ERA Ernest (Tiger) Flowers the best man and ERA Arnold Bradwell a groomsman. Another groomsman ERA Fred Roach had left Neptune and survived. His photo is on the website GroupPhotos/ERAs shown with fellow ERAs Cyril Martin and William Wright who died. The small daughter of Chief ERA Reginald Andrews was a flower girl. Reg Andrews was promoted to Commissioned Engineer in April 1940 and retired as an Engineer Lieutenant Commander MBE serving to the late 1960's.

In a Portsmouth newspaper obituary sent by his cousin Les Lawson it stated that Leonard Woodriffe had passed top

**WEDDING IN  
SOUTH AFRICA**

**NAVAL BRIDEGROOM**

St. Thomas's Church, Rondebosch, Cape Peninsula, was the scene of a Naval wedding on July 1 between Miss Daphne Eileen Margaret Knipe, daughter of Mr. and Mrs L. G. Knipe, and Mr. Leonard G. Woodriffe, Engineerroom Artificer of H.M.S. Neptune, and eldest son of Mr. and Mrs. L. G. Woodriffe, of Portsmouth.

The Rev. Canon W. G. Webster, assisted by the Rev T. Harris, M.A., R.N., Chaplain of H.M.S. Neptune, conducted the ceremony. Mr. Pike was the organist and Miss Dorothy Crisp, of the Cape Town Amateur Operatic Society, was the soloist.

The bride, who was given away by her father, wore a gown of silver brocade, made in Tudor style, with a draped skirt falling into a train. Her embroidered tulle veil was held in place by a coronet of orange blossom. She carried a bouquet of roses and gladioli.

Miss Maureen Knipe, sister of the bride, and Miss Thelma Jennings were the bridesmaids; Mr. E. R. Flowers, R.N., was the best man, and the groomsmen were Mr. A. H. Bradwell, R.N., and Mr. F. Roach, R.N., both of H.M.S. Neptune.

Two little flower girls, Miss Kathline Knipe and Miss Cherry Andrews, the small daughter of Mr. Andrews, Chief Engine Room Artificer of H.M.S. Neptune, wore Kate Greenaway frocks of tulle, with head-dresses of pink and white roses.

The reception was held at Princess's Hotel, Newlands.

The happy couple left later by car to spend their honeymoon touring from the Cape to the Katberg, by way of the Garden Route.

of those selected for promotion to Commissioned Engineer. Sadly he died before he could start the course.



Rev'd Tommy Harris      Arnold Bradwell,      Tiger Flowers      Cyril Martin William Wright F.Roach

Philip Crennell had bought the records and medals from ebay of another of his father's friends, Stoker John Amor Harrison, and this enabled another casualty photo to be added to the website Roll of Honour. Here he is shown in July 1940 aged 17 with his friends at HMS Royal Arthur near Skegness.



Stoker John Amor Harrison under training at Skegness before joining Neptune.

Philip sent me a group photo of 74 engine room men at Simon's Town Navy Days in 1938 but his identification of Stoker John Crennell by the body language was wrong as he had a PO's cap on (unless he borrowed it). The best photo of Navy Days 1938, whose arm badges indicate they are mostly Stokers came from Leading Stoker Alfred Gillingham and was sent by his great nephew Frank Hughes.



Group of 74 Stokers with John Crennell arrowed      Ldg Stoker Alfred Gillingham on ground below X left

On 13 Feb 2021 Philip wrote:

"My dad told me a story of the only time he cried in the war was when he heard that a close friend of his " Chalky " White had gone down with Neptune. I always thought he mentioned a South African but he probably told me he was a New Zealander, I see

there was a "Chalky " White mentioned in the FORUM , do you have a contact number for the lady who mentioned "Chalky as I think this was probably him?"

On 27 Mar 2016 there had been a FORUM message from Donna White in NZ saying "Hi, what a great website, I only re-discovered about H.M.S. Neptune after going back through some old research. Does anyone have any info or photos of William Brian 'Chalky White? He was born in 1918 to Albert White and Olive Hartley. Brian, as he seems to have been called at home, was my 1st cousin twice removed. Anything greatly appreciated, and I have a lot of WHITE info to share, on the NZ side"

I replied : "Hi Donna It's very good to hear from you about Stoker Chalky White, your 1st cousin twice removed. We haven't heard from his relatives before but of the 150 NZ's on board we have contact for 96 of the casualties and photos of 86 of them. It would be great if you can find a photo of Chalky from your family records".

With Philip now in touch with Donna we hope for a photo.

## **6. Sarah Thorpe - niece of AB Eddie Vazey NZVR**

More casualty photos have been received since 2<sup>nd</sup> Supplement issued in Oct 2016

The 48 page 2<sup>nd</sup> supplement to Minefield 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition was published in Oct 2016 and distributed to members. In the Autumn 2019 newsletter, we published the faces of 19 more casualty photos received since 2016. Committee members Christine and Adrian combined with Redeye to produce a leaflet updating the 2016 2<sup>nd</sup> Supplement. We continue to receive contacts from relatives of casualties and in recent weeks this has accelerated thanks to the detective work of Sarah Thorpe, great niece of casualty AB Eddie Vazey. His brother Charlie Vazey was serving in the NZ army and met up with Eddie at Alexandria in 1941. Charlie's daughter Maureen is seen in 2012 with her three children, Marie, Sarah and Andrew, when they heard Eddie's voice for the first time as they listened to a recording of the NZ crew members sending Christmas messages home to their relatives. On 13th November 1941, radio announcer Arch Curry had gone on board to record messages for a Christmas programme which was never broadcast as they all died when Neptune sank a month later.

Thousands of the unit's acetate discs are now in the care of New Zealand's Sound Archives Nga Taonga Korero'. Spectrum records the moment in 2012 when Eddie Vazey's niece and her three children hear his voice 71 years after his death.



AB Eddie Vazey NZ Eddie & brother Charlie Charlie's daughter Maureen with Marie Sarah & Andrew

Recently received photos: The 15 NZs are from Sarah's research on Auckland Museum website & NZ articles. There are 4 new Neptune and 2 new Kandahar casualties.



AB Deryk Barron NZ



PO Steward David Charles



AB Leo Denton NZ



AB Arthur Corbin behind Barton NZ



AB Arthur Diehl NZ



ERA Stanley Hubbard NZ



Stoker John Harrison AB Bertram Lewis(Kandahar aged12) Chief Stoker David Phillips



Stoker Alexander McIver NZ ERA John Moore NZ Petty Officer Sam Patterson NZ



AB Jack Scott NZ ERA James Simpson NZ Electrical Artificer George Smith NZ



AB John Spiers (Kandahar)



Marine Jack Sommerford



AB Jack True NZ



AB Alexander Walker NZ



Shipwright William Wangford NZ



Ord Telegraphist Arthur Wilby

Contact has been made with relatives of 3 more casualties but without photos:  
Stoker Joseph Allen, Leading Stoker Timothy McSweeney, Marine Ronald Young

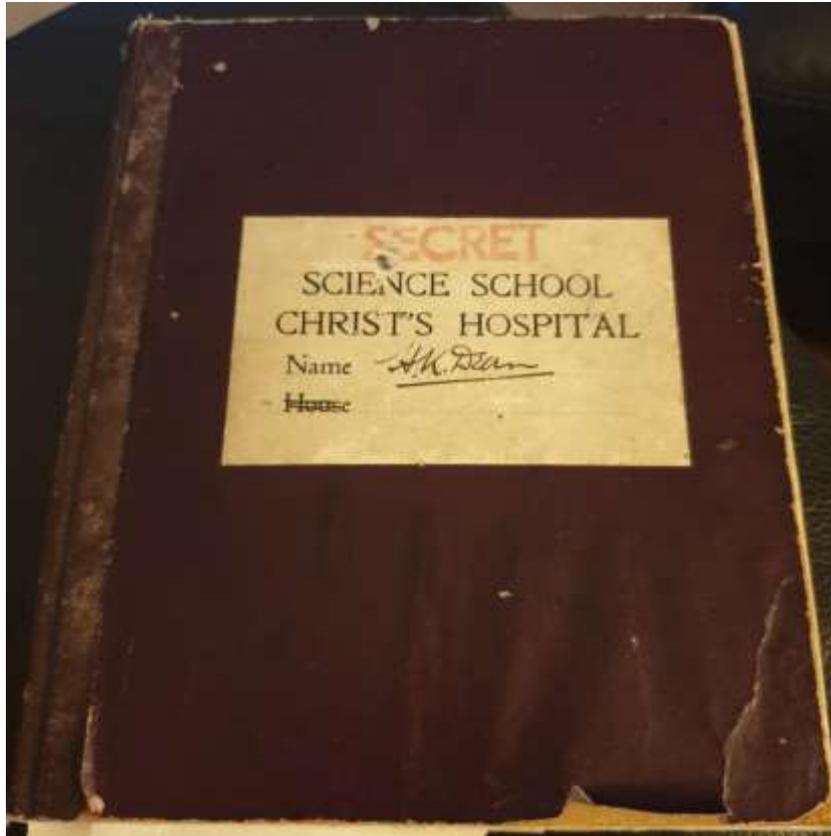
## **7. Finding Paymaster Midshipman Harold Dean's diary in a Cheshire skip**

Extraordinary coincidences continue to help untangle the mysteries surrounding the Neptune tragedy. I call it the Neptune effect in that it seems if we are stuck on some question, help comes from an unexpected direction. One of the strangest flukes was a message on the website FORUM page from 'Paul Noon' on 22<sup>nd</sup> Oct 2019 saying,

"Good evening John  
My brother-in-law has come across the diary of H.K. Dean, Paymaster Midshipman HMS Neptune Sep1940-Aug1941. It is a comprehensive diary from 7th May to the end of August 1941. It contains an officer list, personal letters, naval messages,

pictures, sketches and some details of the final misfortune HMS Neptune suffered. I think it should be in a naval society museum or national naval archive. If you can give me your email I can send over more pictures.

I'll ask my brother-in-law if I can loan you the Diary in the meantime."



I replied "Dear Paul, Thank you so much for making contact and posting your message on the FORUM page. If you can get permission to loan me the notebook I would very much like to see it. I was also at Christ's Hospital from 1949, a bit later than Harold Dean. Way back in 2003 I was in touch with Harold Dean's daughter and she sent me his typed account of what he reckoned had happened to Neptune and remarked how highly he regarded Captain Rory O'Conor. Seeing his notebook would be much better!"

Paul Noon sent me the diary and it proved to be fascinating with Harold's astute commentary on all he witnessed. Of particular interest is his good relationship with and great admiration for Captain Rory O'Conor.

We have just one photo of Harold when he attended a Midshipman's beach party when Neptune was in dry dock at Lagos, largest city of Nigeria. Those present:

The five at the back – Midshipman?, Midshipman Mark Alford, Lieutenant Frank Woodward, Warrant Officer Cyril Laban, Midshipman?

The six in the centre - Midshipman Douglas Holloway, Midshipman Harold Dean, Midshipman Nigel Fawcett, Midshipman David Houston, Surgeon Commander Thomas Larkworthy (with bald head), Midshipman Maurice Ensell

In sand car in front, with scarf – Midshipman Holdsworth



Midshipman's beach party at Lagos 17 Nov1940



Pay Mid Harold Dean

The great gain of getting hold of Harold Dean's diary is that we have a day by day account of Neptune's travels after sailing from Chatham Dockyard on 7<sup>th</sup> May 1941 until he left to join C in C's staff at Alexandria on 1<sup>st</sup> September 1941.

Harold Dean survived the war and served a full career until retiring in about 1976 as Commander (Supply) with an OBE. I was in touch in 2003 with his daughter Patricia Howard who lived in Altringham in Cheshire who wrote to tell me that Harold had died in 2001 aged about 78. Presumably Patricia has also died and the diary ended in the skip after a house clearance.

The diary is now in the hands of Committee member Caroline Meredith (niece of Neptune casualty Dr Cameron Fraser) who is typing it up. Eventually it will be posted on the website DIARIES page.

## **8. Harold Dean's appreciation of Captain Rory O'Connor**

The opinions expressed in these "personal recollections" are purely my own. I served in NEPTUNE from 15 November 1940 to the end of August 1941 and dated events are "Guaranteed" since I made notes in my diary at the time.



Captain O'Connor took command of Neptune at Alexandria on 14<sup>th</sup> May 1940

When not under training I spent my working hours as a Paymaster Midshipman in the Captain's office working closely with Captain Rory O'Connor. Many problems such as

reports of family troubles and sadly of deaths or injuries and loss of homes in the blitz came through the office to our immensely helpful and sympathetic Captain. He would spend hours seeing men alone in the privacy of the Captain's cabin. They would go in tearful at times, and they would come out red-eyed but somehow with shoulders a bit further back perhaps even a weak smile. Rory's relationship with the ship's company was pure magic.

The bad news for me was that I was to leave the ship on 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1941 to join the office of the Commander in Chief. All Paymaster Midshipmen had to "do their Admiral's Office time". But I had spent nine months with the Vice Admiral Commanding First Cruiser Squadron and I didn't see why I should have to go to some lousy shore office.

Rory O'Connor went ashore to plead my case with the Fleet Accountant Officer and the Chief of Staff but to no avail. On Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> August I was asked to dine with him. We were alone and I treasure the memory of that evening to this day. His brilliant mind ranged over the war's progress, the prospects for the future and his own theistic religious beliefs. I suppose I warmed to him so much because his views and those of my father coincided at so many points.

My attachment to NEPTUNE was absolute. The rest of the Navy simply wasn't as good so far as I was concerned. Of course these light cruisers were ideal to serve in. One had the close companionship of the small ship and yet many of the creature comforts of a larger one. As a cruiser we were more self-contained than a destroyer which is dependent on a depot ship or base. And the numbers were just right - about 17 in the Wardroom, 8 in the Gunroom and 5 or 6 in the Warrant Officer's Mess. There was a Royal Marine detachment and a band. The total number was I suppose 590 - 600.

In a less happy, less well managed ship there might have been more trouble over the mixed UK and New Zealand manning. The main cause of this was the differences in pay. I remember having to institute a system of rationing from the clothing store ("slop room") because New Zealand ratings, Artificers in particular, were buying handkerchiefs and socks at a tremendous rate and our stocks would run out. These items were so cheap in their eyes (Twopence for a handkerchief and Ninepence for a pair of socks as I remember) that they were not washing them, but merely throwing them away and buying new.

I must say a little more about the Captain, who so dominated the ship and was so well liked. He had had a first class career and was clearly being groomed for the highest ranks. He made a great mark as Commander of the HOOD about which he wrote a book - "Running a Big Ship on Ten Commandments". It became a "Bible" for all Executive Officers thereafter. He came to NEPTUNE from the Plans Division where he had made a great impression on the Board and on Winston himself. Great things were expected of him.

He was tall with very fair crinkly hair, blue eyes, strong features but kindly, and a soft even voice. The softness was often a thin veneer for steeliness when required. He never raised his voice even in the heat of action. Raucousness was for NCOs. I suppose his real flair was, to use the modern jargon, in communication. He set about making personal contact with all on board. In the midst of every sort of pressure he

could turn to some nervous Boy Seaman terrified of the gunfire and make him feel that his Captain thoroughly understood him but was there to see he was all right.

His approach to the war was refreshing. He would shock the old fashioned with his daily hand written bulletins on the ship's company notice boards, often disclosing news that was restricted or even of high classification. He wanted to ensure we went to war as intelligent informed men not as mere disciplined servants.

After we left Freetown on the way round the Cape to the Middle East, he began his evening quarterdeck talks. He just announced he would be on the quarterdeck at 1700 to chat. Sailors are suspicious beasts. Few turned up the first time. Indeed there were more officers than men. He sat us down on the deck, took up position on a convenient locker or hatch cover and talked about the conduct of the war, events at Homs or anything that entered his mind. Questions came slowly at first but at the end of half an hour we were all keen to talk. He would end up the chat with some light-hearted remark or a joke and we all stood as he doubled off forward to the bridge. He repeated this exercise perhaps half a dozen times during this voyage. After the first two, latecomers had a job finding a square inch of deck to sit on. We loved father's talks.

The only compensation for my going to the C in C's Office was my renewed acquaintance with high grade cyphering work and my special induction to the tightest secret of all – ULTRA – I became absorbed with war at the top. I worked ashore but went to sea in QUEEN ELIZABETH whenever Admiral Cunningham embarked.

During October I made two visits to NEPTUNE and each time was able to give Rory a little "inside" information for which he was most grateful. (NOT I would hasten to say from ULTRA sources or special submarine operations). In due course I tipped him off that he was bound for Malta to reinforce the very successful Force K. He was delighted. The prospect of getting away from Alexandria and working with this largely independent light cruiser squadron wreaking havoc with Axis shipping in the Central Mediterranean was much to his liking. And I was furious at missing the "fun".

The tragic events of November and December 1941 are well chronicled in official histories. They began on 25<sup>th</sup> November when I watched BARHAM from the quarterdeck of QE and saw her blow up before my disbelieving eyes.

NEPTUNE herself went down at the same time as I was being blown out of the QE's Gunroom armchair by the mine placed under us by an Italian midget submarine. In the ensuing days I had the dismal task of examining the draft casualty signals for NEPTUNE compiled from Base records and correcting them where I knew from memory that ratings were not on board.

What happened on board NEPTUNE in those last hours, we shall never know. I have heard Rory O'Connor criticised for not getting as many as possible of his people away to other ships in boats after the first mine which had in fact wrecked the propellers and steering. He should have then considered whether or not a tow was feasible. For myself, I don't know. Perhaps the weather, perhaps the state of the boats may have led him to dismiss this possibility.

AURORA and PENELOPE had also hit mines after NEPTUNE's first, but retained power and managed to limp back to Malta. JAGUAR did marvellous work rescuing survivors from KANDAHAR. In Alexandria, QUEEN ELIZABETH and VALIANT sat on the mud with great holes in them. Certainly 19<sup>th</sup> December 1941 will remain for me a black day. At the time I wrote "All comment on these events by me is superfluous. No one can ever realise how happy I had been in NEPTUNE. No one will ever know what a blow this has been. In particular, I had lost in Rory O'Connor a dear and great friend. I am entirely sincere when I say I should never have left that ship. I should have been with them all at the last".

## **9. Frank Woodward's Wartime History of HMS Neptune**

*On 13 November 1941, Radio Announcer Arch Curry went aboard HMS Neptune to record messages from New Zealand crew members for a Christmas programme back home that was never to be broadcast. To set the scene Lieutenant Frank Woodward (father of Association member Mrs. Gillian Cross) prepared and delivered a brief summary of the part played by Neptune in the war to that date. What follows is a transcript of his words by kind permission of Mrs Cross.*



I want to tell you about one of His Majesty's cruisers which has played a useful part in this war but, like many other ships of the silent service, her deeds so far have not been made public. This ship is *HMS Neptune* and she is manned by officers and men from all parts of the Empire among whom are nearly two hundred New Zealanders. The rest of the ship's company come from Australia, Canada, South Africa, Newfoundland and Saint Helena as well as from the United Kingdom.

There has been a *Neptune* in the Royal Navy for over three hundred years continuously except for two gaps of about ten years. Her battle honours are many and include Quebec, Trafalgar and Jutland. At Trafalgar it is interesting as three *Neptunes* took part: a British *Neptune*; a French *Neptune*; and a Spanish *Neptuno*.

The present ship to bear the name is the eleventh *Neptune* and she commenced her service in February nineteen thirty four. Her sister ships are *Ajax*, *Achilles*, *Leander* and *Orion*. All have distinguished themselves in this war. *Ajax* and *Achilles*, it will be remembered, took part in the Battle of the River Plate. *Achilles* and *Leander* are both ships of the Royal New Zealand Navy.

When war broke out, *Neptune* was the flag ship of the Africa Station, flying the flag of Vice Admiral Sir D'Oyly Lyon. She was employed at once in protecting the trade routes of the South Atlantic and during the opening months of the war intercepted the German steam ships *Inn* and *Adolph Woermann*. Both ships were scuttled by their crews.



Just before Italy declared war on us, *Neptune* moved to the Mediterranean and for a short time had the honour of flying the flag of the Commander-in-chief, Admiral Sir Andrew Cunningham. Her first active operation was to bombard Mussolini's bastion of fascism in Africa that is Bardia and, on daybreak on the twenty-first of June nineteen forty, in company with *HMS Orion*, the Australian cruiser *Sydney* and the French battleship *Lorraine* the fortress was left burning. On June the twenty-eighth nineteen forty *Neptune* took part in the first sea engagement of this theatre of the war. Towards sunset south of Zante when forming part of the Seventh Cruiser Squadron under Admiral Tovey, three Italian destroyers were intercepted carrying troops to Libya. After a chase at full speed, the destroyer *Espero* was sunk and her consorts escaped under cover of darkness to Italy.

Soon afterwards, on July the ninth nineteen forty the first engagement between the British and Italian battle fleets took place. *Neptune* was the first ship to report the "Enemy battle fleet in sight" to the Commander-in-chief in action with the Italians off Calabria. This report has not been made in the Mediterranean since seventeen ninety eight when the French fleet in Aboukir Bay was reported to Lord Nelson by the frigate *Zealous*. *Neptune* was twice heavily engaged with Italian cruisers at long range, hit the eight inch gun cruiser *Bolzano* and came under the fire of the enemy battleship. The enemy fleet retreated towards Messina.



The last operation before *Neptune* left the Mediterranean was in company with *HMAS Sydney* when a raid was made into the Aegean on July the twenty eighth and it was to intercept and destroy the tanker *Ermioni* laden with petrol for the enemy air forces in the Dodecanese who repeatedly bombed the ships in the Thermia Channel during the operation. The remainder of the year *Neptune* was employed firstly in protecting the trade routes in the Southern Indian Ocean when on some occasions the ship was at sea for nearly a month and experienced the climate varying from tropical heat to the cold of the Antarctic below latitude fifty degrees south. Later she moved to equatorial Africa to become Vice Admiral J H D Cunningham's flag ship and to assist to establish that part of the world under Free French administration.

At the beginning of nineteen forty one, after three and a half years' service abroad, *Neptune* returned to the United Kingdom, but soon she was on her way again, this time escorting a convoy of troops and equipment to the Middle East. Soon after leaving England and just north of the Azores, the German naval supply ship *Gonzenheim* operating for the *Bismarck* was destroyed and seventy eight prisoners were taken.



*Neptune* once more has the honour to serve under the flag of the Commander-in-Chief Mediterranean, Admiral Sir Andrew Cunningham. Recently she returned to Bardia,

which has changed hands twice during her absence and she bombarded it by night on this occasion inflicting damage to enemy headquarters and gun repair shops. The enemy replied but their fire was ineffective. The deeds of cruisers only occasionally make headlines in the newspapers but this account of *Neptune's* war efforts shows that her duties have been many and varied and in the first two years of the war she steamed one hundred and fifty eight thousand five hundred miles equivalent to seven and a half times round the world. Her motto is "Regnare est servire" which means "To rule is to serve" and we hope that this service has helped Britannia to rule the waves.

## **10. The chaotic civil war raging in Libya**

Libya is the fourth largest country in Africa, larger than France, Germany, Italy and UK combined. Since Neptune's wreck lies close to their 12mile limit, my thoughts on the current state in Libya: The Daily Telegraph reported (8<sup>th</sup> Feb 2021) "Libya has been mired in chaos since a NATO backed campaign ousted Muammar Gaddafi in 2011. A disputed election split the country between east and west: the internationally recognised Government of National Accord in Tripoli (GNA) and the parallel Libyan National Accord (LNA) under General Haftar in Benghazi.

The election of four interim leaders from across the country marks a potential turning point with Mr Dbeibah promising to listen to and work with all Libyans. He has 21 days to present a cabinet to parliament. This qualified statement of support illustrates the challenge of uniting Libya before the presidential elections in December 2021".

Saif [al-Islam Gaddafi is the strongest opponent of Haftar and Faiz Sarraj \(Wikipedia\)](#)

Nine years after the start of the **Libyan revolution** and the overthrow and death of Muammar Gaddafi, his 48-year-old son Saif al-Islam remains the one member of the family who retains influence and political ambitions, trying to return to power. Despite the escalation of armed conflict between the internationally recognized Government of National Accord and General Khalifa Haftar, both sides shared a hostile position towards the colonel's son. While Haftar considered Saif al-Islam "the poor boy on whom some naive people are betting," Faiz Sarraj is confident that he should be extradited to the International Criminal Court for war crimes against the rebels.

Saif al-Islam Gaddafi attracted attention again when the Qadhadhfa tribe (the largest armed Libyan tribe to which Colonel Gaddafi belonged) refused to further participate in the hostilities on the side of Haftar. The tribal council demanded the release of all detained residents of the city. This was considered the biggest threat to Haftar, as the tribe had been his biggest ally in Sirte. The forces of the GNA have besieged Sirte for over 100 days.

Three out of eight children of late **Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi** were killed along with their father during the Libyan revolution in 2011. The handcuffed colonel was killed in captivity by the Abu Bakr al-Siddiq Brigade in the city of Zintan, southwest of Tripoli, after a failed attempt to cross the border into Niger. A few days later, the efforts of the rebels succeeded in their aim of finding Saif al-Islam, the son of Muammar Gaddafi most involved in government affairs.

Initially, the Zintan Brigade refused to extradite Saif al-Islam and kept him in custody. They cut off three fingers on his once threatening right hand and knocked out his teeth. He was sentenced to death and imprisoned in the city of Zintan for about six years before the government in eastern Libya, supported by the Tobruk parliament, decided

to release him. Saif al-Islam was released from prison in June 2017 under an amnesty law. He then moved to eastern Libya, where his whereabouts for security reasons remain secret. Then he went abroad, and successfully helped his tribe regain its former influence in the southern region of the country, as well as establishing contact with the Libyan tribes in the east.

Due to the difficult political situation in Sirte after armed clashes with the Qadhadhfa tribe, Haftar refused a cease fire and fired 12 Grad missiles at GNA forces west of Sirte. His war against Tripoli was supposed to last for two weeks but has turned into a prolonged 14-month standoff. He has lost all support in Western Libya.

## **11. Neptune books and DVDs**

Four Neptune books and three DVD's are available through our website [www.hmsneptune.com](http://www.hmsneptune.com) - prices include postage & packing.

"Minefield" & "Supplement", "Sole Survivor", "Neptune's Legacy" and "Building the Monument"- all at £15 each

"Malta to Tripoli DVD" by John Mizzi (£3)

"Neptune Association Inaugural meeting Dec 2003 DVD" (£3)

"Voices of NZ casualties recorded on 13 Nov 41 DVD"

**To purchase any of these apply to:** Mrs Maureen Hayhurst, Honorary Secretary to The Neptune Association, Beck Side, Old Manor Farm, Manor Road, Wick, Bristol, BS30 5RG, UK (email : [mhayhurst@btinternet.com](mailto:mhayhurst@btinternet.com))

---

### **Reply slip for AGM , Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> October 2021**

I wish to attend the AGM

I will be bringing ..... guests

Name: (block capitals please)

---

Address

---

---

Please send to Mrs Maureen Hayhurst, Honorary Secretary to The Neptune Association, Beck Side, Old Manor Farm, Manor Road, Wick, Bristol BS30 5RG – or telephone her on 0117 937 3750 or e-mail her at [mhayhurst@btinternet.com](mailto:mhayhurst@btinternet.com).