



WSTG Reunion Newsletter



May 2010

www.wstg.co.uk

Bucking the Trend?

If you belong to any other reunion group you will probably have noticed that as the years go by the numbers diminish and there is usually talk of whether it is worth continuing the meetings. WSTG is, as usual, a little different. Each Christmas event, in particular, has seen a steady increase in our numbers. Sadly we have had our losses over the years, but we are pleased to report that, not only more people who regularly receive the Newsletter and flyer have decided to come along, but we continue to renew contacts both through the WSTG website and "chance meetings".

Our Christmas Party 2009 saw an attendance of over 70 colleagues, partners and widows on this 50th year since WSTG was founded. OK, the group did not quite last in name for that time, but we had to mark the occasion: WSTG has had a great impact on our working lives and in many cases domestic lives too.

In the past we might have celebrated by laying on some bottles of "fizz", encouraging everyone to drink a little more than they intended. Times have changed however, and so we commissioned a cake as an appropriate alternative.

Sylvia White, indeed, produced a magnificent cake that was not only photogenic, but tasted as good as it looked, decorated

with the WSTG emblem on a background of white Belgian chocolate.

Trevor Mitchell, who seemed quite reluctant to make the first incision, undertook a ceremonial cutting of the cake. Trevor was elected to do the honours as the WSTG member who had joined closest to the foundation date. He was a very young lad at that time, of course! (See Trevor's Page on the website).



"A ceremonial incision" by Trevor Mitchell

All this occurred before our buffet lunch, produced to a very high standard by Sally Gissing our regular caterer, and more drinks from the well stocked bar.

We regret that some colleagues could not make it for various reasons, but were delighted to see our usual long- distance



"WSTG 50 YEARS ON"

travellers from Barrow and the West Country.

Ivan Winter produced a display board with some archive pictures and the Admiralty Fleet Order (AFO) that "brought WSTG to life". Ken Wingate too produced a collection of pictures from long-ago social and other events, some of which had not been worth printing until the advent of digital photography!

A caption competition featuring a picture, "sneakily" taken by Ken Bevis of Adrian and Louis "slumbering" on the return journey from our day out at the War Museum netted Chris Arrowsmith a decent bottle of vino. Many more departed with quality prizes from our Christmas Draw. And Carole Figueras took home some chocolates and a bottle of liqueur as this year's winner of the Ladies' Free Draw.



Knocker White and Joe Cleall with Simon Fiddian & Gordon Bone

The Committee extend their thanks to the ladies who prepare the tables, sell the raffle tickets and generally give a helping hand, and to Sylvia White for providing our cake. Finally, thank you all for your continued support.

Sad News

It is with sadness that we have to report the loss of John Brook who died early this year. Regrettably John was not on our list of contacts but remained in Southsea after he retired from the Ranges Group in the early 1990's. We understand that John started his civilian career with MOD(N) at Portland up on retirement in the rank of Lieutenant from the Royal Navy. One of John's sphere's of interest was the EW Calibration Facilities (CALFAC) which at one stage was to be administered by the Ranges Group. In this context John often met up with the EW project team (Ken Wingate & Co) at Portland and Skipness. Neil Buchanan, who is a recently renewed contact was the local Ranges representative for Skipness around that time.

George Scutt: A Career in Communication in War and Peace Time

George is another past member of WSTG who we knew had an interesting life story to tell. On 23rd March Ken and I joined Eileen and George in their lounge and recorded the following story.

George Scutt was born on the 4 July 1921 in Chichester and continued to live and complete his education in the city.

On leaving school he first worked as an apprentice with an electrical contractor who also had two radio shops in the area, but the business failed and George, being left "high and dry", briefly worked in a brewery!

In 1939, with war being a possibility,

George and two of his pals decided to apply to join the Royal Navy. One of them was rejected because of colour blindness, later joining as a telegraphist, the other two (including George) joined as ordinary seamen. However both of them decided to transfer to the telegraphist branch and in May 1939 joined their friend. More training, and testing was now required at HMS Victory



Early Days: George and his pal Frank Davis

(Signal School) where

George at this time was to achieve a 100% test result; in his words: "for the first and only time".

George was then posted to his first ship, HMS Effingham.

In the spring of 1940 both the UK and Germany planned an invasion of Norway but Germany struck first and the allies had to use the RN to ferry troops to Norway. A task force including HMS Effingham, that had embarked 1000 troops with equipment, sailed for Norway. Taking a short cut both HMS Matabele and HMS Effingham ran aground. The ship, with our George on board, was badly damaged and after landing the crew and the troops, but no equipment, she became a "constructive loss"



HMS Effingham

George was sent ashore as a Coder. He was first accommodated in a furniture shop and then a school with an oerlikon gun hammering at the Luftwaffe that repeatedly attacked the British positions. Feeling the cold at night in these uncomfortable conditions he described how he used heavy white camouflage coats discarded by the army due to their weight as bedding! When the decision was made to evacuate allied forces he embarked on a Polish ship with about 1000 French Legionnaires. The Luftwaffe also attacked this ship; however George's main

complaint was that the bread was so mouldy that only the centre was edible!

After the Norway episode George joined MS Aberdonian, an elderly passenger cargo ship taken up by the Admiralty for use as a coastal Forces depot ship. She was deployed on the 11 April 1941 to the West coast of Scotland as a depot ship for MTBs.

Once again he was subjected to the Luftwaffe's attention as they attempted to bomb the local hydro-electricity station.

George was then detailed for submarine training and joined HMS Dolphin in Sept 1941. He explained that although being detailed to train as a submariner he could, after the four weeks at HMS Dolphin, go back to General Service if he so wished. However, George thought that it was not too bad and so decided to stay in submarines.

In February 1942, after completing his training he joined HMS Severn, a 2500-ton river class fleet boat built in 1935. At 22 knots surfaced they were fast enough to keep up with the Fleet. But although armed with 6 torpedo tubes and a 4inch QF gun their diving depth had been compromised to keep weight down. (*Not what you want to hear during a war!*)

A bit of luck now for George: it was decided that HMS Severn would go to the States for a 6 month refit, from April of 1942. He picked up his leading telegraphist rate and celebrated his 21st birthday in Philadelphia, the refit port.

It was here that George did a bit of "James Bond work" as he collaborated with some US scientists on the then

new infrared detection technology. Working in strange places such as the top floor of a hotel and other questionable locations where line of sight communications were possible, he was told that "he was on his own if he was rumbled" working with his Aldis lamp!

Experiencing only one



HMS Severn

anxious moment in HMS Severn when the aft hydroplane jammed, George then contracted appendicitis and so both submarine and telegraphist arrived in Glasgow for repairs! Afterwards George joined HMS Forth and completed courses for PO telegraphist.

Fate took him to his next posting: the PO Tel. on HMS Trenchant had gone sick and on the 12 May 1944, George got a "pier head jump" to join that boat. She was Chatham built, and commissioned 31 Jan 1944.

Her commanding officer was Lt Cdr Hezlet, who, with his crew, were to become famous for exploits in the Japanese War.

HMS Trenchant left on a two-month passage to Colombo where she was to carry out 7 patrols in the Indian Ocean. During these patrols off Sumatra, HMS Trenchant had many notable successes between August 1944 and July 1945. As the boat had early radar Type 267 and asdic (sonar) George's tasks broadened to include the maintenance of these equipments.

Action off Penang in the



HMS Trenchant, Freemantle.

Straits of Malacca, on 23 September 1944, occurred when a Type IXD2-boat U-859 was spotted en route from Germany to join up with the Japanese navy; on board were 31 tons of mercury. A snap shot from Trenchant's two rear torpedo tubes sunk the U boat, and 11 survivors were recovered. The mercury too was recovered some years later only for it to be declared to be Germany's property.

The lucky prisoners were to show their gratitude for being picked up by getting Trenchant's German-designed water distillation plant working for the first time during the commission!

HMS Trenchant undertook other tasks around this period that included landing commandos to destroy a bridge on the River Kwai, and the last attack of the war using two-man submarines or chariots.

This attack occurred on 27 October 1944: Lt Cdr Hezlet, who had gained much experience with the midget submarines in earlier years, skilfully manoeuvred Trenchant to launch two of them on a mission "tantamount to suicide" in the Japanese-held Phuket harbour. The objective was to mine two Italian merchant ships, which George

said were scuttled when Italy capitulated. But "intelligence" had discovered that the Japanese were now repairing

these vessels. The chariots (*Tiny and Slasher*) each mined one of the ships and the very brave "charioteers" were, "after careful reconnaissance" picked up in good time to see their targets exploding!



A relic of those momentous times, kept by George

Back off Sumatra, HMS Trenchant's best known action occurred on the 8th June 1945, in the Banka Straits. A US submarine reported the presence of the cruiser IJN Ashigara and escort destroyer Kamikaze. Cdr Hezlet took Trenchant through the harbour defences in a plan to ambush the Japanese ships. Kamikaze did in fact detect the Trenchant and fired at her, but had to turn away from a torpedo fired by Trenchant!

At 1148hrs Ashigara was seen and 8 torpedoes from the bow tubes were fired at her, five of which hit their target. The stricken cruiser fired at Trenchant's periscope as C.O. Hezlet

allowed his crew, including George to view the scene as the Ashigara capsized.

No survivors were recovered on this occasion, but George did recall that in another action when they sank a Japanese ammunition ship, 14 very reluctant Japanese were rescued. He explained that Japanese prisoner "were difficult" and although one in this group did die, the others "bucked up" when fed tinned pears, as by this stage of the war their rations were not good.

The sinking of such an important cruiser made HMS Trenchant famous and she set off for Manila for celebrations and decorations. George showed us an original sheet of all the signals received by Trenchant and his copy of the document when he was mentioned in despatches.

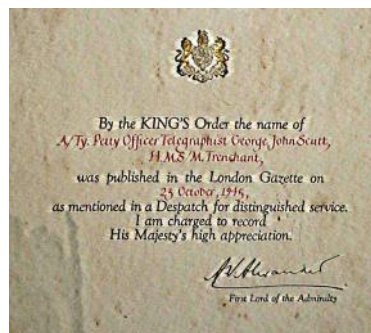
Here are two significant quotes from the signals on the above sheet:

"Please extend to the CO of HMS Trenchant my congratulations and those of the entire submarine force on his work of adding to the Japanese Under Sea Fleet."

and

"You have avenged Exeter and Houston"

George then recounted the



"Mentioned in Despatches"

role he played when the US air force deployed B29 Superfortresses from India in a raid on the Sumatran oil refinery.

HMS Trenchant was to be the listening post for any air sea rescue operation, and George had to stand on the casing with his wireless kit hanging on the jumping wire. The CO told him that if an emergency dive was needed "he hoped George was a strong swimmer", because he would have to leave him in the water on his own for a while! Luckily, all went well!

Back in Freemantle George took leave and went on a trip with the local post-man. On their return they were met by celebrations as VJ day was announced.

HMS Trenchant returned to Portsmouth for a well-earned refit.

George left the Navy on July 4th 1946 with his very eventful seven-year stint completed.

After a short period with Lec (refrigeration), George decided to seek employment with the Admiralty and went to work at Funtington airfield in the mobile radio group. Here he met up with Norman Dibley late of the Fleet Air Arm and an old Chichester pal, and Eric Shoemith DSM. All three of them were "Radio Mechs" and would eventually become members of WSTG.

New Years Eve 1946 proved to be another landmark in his life as he celebrated the occasion with two young ladies. He was to escort one home but she let Eileen (the other one) take-over, telling her that George "was very nice". George and Eileen married in 1947 and have celebrated over 60 years of marriage. Photos of their four children, three girls and a boy hang in the lounge.

In 1954 all radio/electronics groups came into No 2 shop in Portsmouth dockyard

where George worked in the Radio Equipment Section on HF and UHF Communications, Radar and Asdic (Sonar) equipments, both "Afloat" and in the "Shop". He was also involved in establishing the Standards Laboratory, and had the task of putting the foreman's (Max Peddar's) ideas of what was needed into practice. By this time George had been a diagnostician (TG3) for a few years.

Like many young men of this era George volunteered for "foreign service" in one of HM Dockyards abroad.



George Scutt retires from WSTG in 1981

In August 1957 the family sailed for Hong Kong, but the contraction of the UK's ship fitting assets was about to begin, and this foreign tour was to end with a transfer to Gibraltar following the closure of Hong Kong.

George joined WSTG in 1961 on promotion to TG2 (PTO3); he once again worked in the Comms Section on many RN craft specialising in a number of HF – UHF equipments.

During his service with WSTG George was promoted to PTO2 and retired in that grade on 3 July 1981. Eileen and George obviously

did not reckon on a quiet time in retirement as in the last thirty years they have travelled the globe. Souvenir plates adorn the walls of the lounge, the Taj Mahal; Inca kings, the Serengeti and, his favourite place, Kenya with its safari parks are all remembered. They returned from Kenya again earlier this year, having enjoyed another of many visits, despite the attendant travel difficulties and George developing a hernia - now fixed!

We had a very interesting afternoon with Eileen and George and can only wish them many more stamps in their passports.

An extended version of this write-up can be found on our website:
www.wstg.co.uk
on "George's page"

Bert Norris' Birthday Surprise

Bert Norris is one of our oldest colleagues and on 3 February 2010 he reached the grand age of 90 years young! To mark the occasion a "pop-in" by friends, old working colleagues and family members was organised by his sons at his home in Horndean.

The problem that Bert's son Phil had, was contacting



Bert Norris pictured on his 90th Birthday



Ken W "snaps" Bert with his sons and elder sister

WSTG colleagues without Bert knowing. This is where the WSTG website became useful: a quick search and an Email to Adrian Wright soon made it known to us of a plan to surprise Bert on his birthday.

On the day in question, winter had taken its toll and our number was reduced, but Ted Arnold, Ivan Winter, Pat Cross and Ken Wingate duly arrived at Bert's home around mid-afternoon to take the place of a contingent from his dancing club. Bert's hobby is all types of ballroom dancing – except possibly Jive and Latin American dances! Bert was on the organising committee for dances at the local community centre for some 18 years. He has recently retired from that post although keeps dancing despite a recurring back problem.

Bert continued to express surprise as more visitors arrived, and was totally astonished when his elder sister came in, whom he had not seen for some months!

We chatted with the neighbours and family and particular Bert's sons who had pinned a copy of "Bert's Page" from our website in the hall! Apparently Bert had not told his career story in any detail until we asked him if we could do something for The WSTG

Newsletter.

More people, including Bert's younger sister, arrived armed with cards, bottles and other presents. And so, having drunk to Bert's good health and many happy returns, and had a snack or two from the spread that had

been prepared we took our leave. Bert continued to greet fresh visitors.

He bid us farewell, promising to see us all at the next reunion.

Portsdown Main Building to be Demolished

For those who are not resident in the Portsmouth area or who do not read the local newspaper we have to report that what most of us knew as the ASWE main building (and the adjacent out buildings) are to be taken down. They say that the land will then be restored to its original use as farmland, notwithstanding that it remains adjacent to the Land Base Test Site that is still very much in use.

Many of us were "lodgers" at Portsdown for some years, while others went on to be employed by MOD authorities based in the building. For us, the 1930's Art Deco building, eventually constructed in the very early 1950's, is a slice of nostalgia we shall miss very much.

The building was vacated in 1997 and has gone into a state of "disgraceful degradation" ever since.

So, demolition is perhaps the best option!