



WSTG Reunion Newsletter



November 2007
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SPRING REUNION

The committee agreed to delay the date of our Spring get-together by one week this year for various reasons. One being to get us clear of late Spring holidays and another to allow some of our colleagues who usually miss this event because of other annual commitments, to come along. The delay achieved its objective for Dick Barton, Ron Kimber and a couple of other of our supporters but *Sod's Law* also came into play: Dave Stoodley's annual hospital visit was also moved by one week, and our event coincided with Ken Hoad's Diamond wedding anniversary. Up until now, Ken has never missed a Spring Reunion!

There were other regulars missing too, but as usual there were a couple of surprises. Peter Burton and Barry Robinson came along for the first time and Ted Arnold and Tony Morriss were back supporting us again. Ted, however, had to leave early to attend his French language class. Not the class where the oldies keep their "hand in" for the annual holiday in France. This was serious stuff: the last class before the A level Exams!

We were pleased to see Brian Dubber again following serious illness. It was Roger Fiddy's suggestion that Brian should come to this event, but could not bring him due to work commitments. However Adrian Wright volunteered as driver and

we were delighted to see Brian, after an absence of more than eighteen months from our social scene, and his wife Irene.



Brian Dubber

Ladies are very much in the minority at the Spring get-together but we believe Irene Dubber and Gwenda Hayhoe, who accompanied Ray, and of course Joyce Baker enjoyed the day as much as the male contingent. A decent buffet lunch, a couple of drinks and a good "natter" is our recipe for a pleasant couple of hours together.



Kelvin Neal, Rod Howes and Chris Arrowsmith

Of our 32 attendees Roger Eves held the record for travelling the longest distance from his home near Barrow to be at this event,

with Chris Arrowsmith from Gloucestershire, who rarely misses our reunions, as runner-up. This year only two of our number, who were expected did not make it. Wind and tide was George Durant's excuse as he sailed back from the Isle of Wight early that morning. (I now realise why certain ADs had boat owners transferred out of their sections!)



Our Sudoku big cash prize winner Geoff White.

Did you get a drink? No, neither did I!

RON WHITE RETIRES

On Friday 26 October 2007 it is estimated that around fifty or more colleagues and friends gathered at the Alexandra Bowling Club to celebrate Ron White's retirement. Ron actually finished work on 21st September, and unlike many contemporaries in the MOD weapons field Ron's career did not end in early retirement. His final period of employment was with QinetiQ on Combat systems integration, although Ron already had had experience

of private industry with Ferranti from 1985-87.



Ron and his wife
Anne

Ron joined WSTG in 1968 in the early days of digitised combat data, shimmering tactical and tote displays and programming in machine code or a low-level language. His colleagues



who came to wish him well from that time included Joe Cleall, Roger Phillips and of course Peter Horrocks.

From the later days in his long career, after finally leaving WSTG in 1998 and joining DTSS, were many colleagues from Portsdown including Charlie Cooper late of the Land Based Test Site.

We wish Ron a long and happy retirement and hope he will draw all three pensions for many years to come!

Ivan Winter recalls a famous WSTG old boy: ERIC SHOESMITH DSM

When I joined WSTG in 1961 one of the first to offer a friendly greeting in No 4 The Parade was Eric Shoemsmith. At the time I did not realise how much of the next few years I would spend working with him and I was unaware of his brilliant wartime record.

Eric Arthur Shoemsmith was born in Blackpool on the 16th March 1912; he never forgot his roots and would sometimes deviate to his hometown on his frequent trips to Scotland for WSTG.

I think I would be fair to him if I said he was of humble origins; a rough diamond or even a very rough diamond. He joined the Navy as a boy entrant in HMS Impregnable at Devonport in 1927 at the age of 15. After training, his first ship was the light cruiser HMS Curacao, a ship that was lost during WW 2 when she was sliced in half by the Queen Mary with 300 crewmen being lost. After the Curacao his next ships were the aircraft carriers Courageous and Furious as he was now serving in the Fleet Air Arm as a Telegraphist Air Gunner. HMS Courageous was lost early in the war on Sept 17th 1939.

In the 1930s the RN stuck with the tried and tested biplane configuration which gave good take off and landing qualities. A typical aircraft being the Fairy Swordfish, which served throughout the second world war. In 1936 Eric joined 718 Flight on the cruiser HMS

Exeter. These ships carried two Supermarine Walrus biplanes as reconnaissance and gunnery spotter aircraft. They were carried aft being launched from a catapult and recovered by means of cranes.



Exeter was a fairly new ship having been completed in Devonport in 1930. As can be seen in the photo of the Supermarine Walrus, designed by the famous R J Mitchell, only the pilot had cover. The other two crew members, one in the extreme nose and the other aft of the wings were exposed to the elements, but both had a weapon to fire at the opposition. HMS Exeter did some "Flag waving" trips to the south Atlantic and Eric would talk of hair raising runs ashore in Argentina and Brazil, where "Jolly Jack" would return to the ship having refreshed all parts it was possible to refresh. His descriptions of the resulting inspections, which always



seemed to involve sharp instruments and a lot of pain, could bring tears to your eyes. Eric was still on Exeter when war was declared and she was dispatched to join

Commodore Harwood's South Atlantic squadron to counter the successful commerce raiding of the Graf Spee. I will not write about the Battle of the River Plate as Vic Clements and I had done for publication in the Dockyard newspaper *Trident* and *The (Portsmouth) News* in 1985, upon Eric's death, but quote from the

London Gazette of 23rd Feb 1940:

Eric A Shoemsmith, Acting Leading Airman Fleet Air Arm: who on his own initiative, despite his clothing being soaked in petrol, climbed on to the top of the centre section of the aircraft and cleared the triatic stay which had fallen across it, thus freeing the aircraft for jettisoning. While he did the ship was under heavy fire, the petrol leaking from the aircraft was a great danger and A turret was firing on a forward bearing.

Eric was one of a number of sailors who became heroes when Graf Spee concentrated her fire on HMS Exeter on 13th December 1939, and in February 1940 Eric's great courage was recognised: he received the DSM from HM King George VI.

Eric however was fortunate to leave Exeter before 1st March 1942 when she was lost in an action against the Japanese with the surviving crew ending up as POWs of

the Japanese. I have no information on his duties later in the war, but he was lucky to survive in the dangerous task of Telegraphist Air Gunner. His medals show his areas of action i.e. the Atlantic Star, Burma Star and Bar, the 1939-1945 Star and the 1939-1945 Medal.

On leaving the navy he joined the Admiralty where he put his electronic skills to work in the Production Department on the many ships being taken out of mothballs as a result of the cold war. The Korean conflict also meant a new life for many retired ships.

In 1959 when WSTG was formed from various setting-to-work organisations Eric joined as a founder member and worked in the radar section. I worked with Eric on various equipments, but some come more easily to mind. We were detailed to work on an Egyptian warship, EL Fatah the Ex HMS Zenith, at Sammy Whites at Cowes. Our task there being to bring to life the 275 radar and Mk37 greenhouse director after it had been misused by the Egyptians and a contractor. The contractor had effectively booby trapped it for us by shorting out all of the safety interlocks. We gained instant stardom from the Egyptians by getting a long dead plotting table working within a couple of minutes, the flash of a short-circuit to the mainframe being seen with the lights out!

Eric had a gift for finding cheap digs, a gift which proved to be essential as we started the job during Cowes week. Some how he found a landlady on the local council estate; the week's stay there was an education for me, and I never did work out how many adults and kids shared the house with us! Thank heavens Cowes week was not Cowes month. We did, however, after many

weeks of pleasant work get standards achieved at Hats and Sats. (I also achieved a reasonable standard at darts in a local pub.) (The ship was subsequently sunk in harbour by the Israelis. We were not surprised as the crew were probably more adept at slaughtering sheep on board than maintaining the equipment.)

Another trip to Portland found us overnight in the Salvation Army hostel - definitely different. I half expected to be hung over a line for the night. On later trips to Wallsend, working on Seaslug with him, I found my own digs - just as well, because Eric was now into camping - in a tent. Working on Seaslug had its moments as we managed to move the beam aiming unit whilst an engineer was in the director, Eric proved conclusively that right was on our side but it did take a few well chosen words. He continued working in the radar section until his retirement as a PTOIII in March 1977 when he received the ISM. He retired to Glasgow but returned to Portchester in the 1980s and died on the 15th May 1985. Rough diamond maybe, but a nice man with I'm sure many untold tales of life in the Navy in the 1930s and 40s. The "complete" WSTG story needs no telling as many of us remember Shoey and his colourful lifestyle.

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WSTG VISIT HMS BELFAST

On a typical dull autumn morning on 10 October 2007 exactly a dozen of us set out on the National Express 08.45 coach to visit the cruiser now moored on the Thames. All who planned to come were on the coach by the time we left Cowplain and the time passed fairly quickly as "we chatted our way" to Victoria.



As with our Tangmere "adventure", HMS Belfast had notice of our arrival and our group booking. Surprisingly, we did all arrive there together although we almost lost Dick Barton and Pat Cross at Victoria when some decided to spend a penny (well, 20p actually) before travelling on the Underground. After a miscount of the number in the party by Ken Wingate (our treasurer!!) we eventually travelled on a group return ticket to London Bridge at quite a saving.



Six inch guns trained and elevated to wreak havoc and destruction 14.5miles away. *That would be around Barnet from this berth!*

After an easy climb aboard and taking group photographs on the quarterdeck, our first stop was the "Walrus Café" for a light lunch. The café is the hangar of the successful Walrus armed spotter/ reconnaissance seaplane designed by R J Mitchell who was very much in evidence at Tangmere with the Spitfire aircraft.

A extremely short potted history of HMS Belfast is perhaps appropriate here: Completion in 1938 and extensively damaged by a mine in

1939; Artic Convoys and battle of the North Cape/ sinking of the *Scharnhorst*; 1942 onwards; bombardment support for Normandy landings, 1944; Far East and post war support and peace keeping support 1945-47; Far East, China and the HMS Amethyst incident, 1949; the Korean war – bombardment support to retreating forces 1950; final commission in the Far East 1959-62; saved from the breakers yard and brought to London, 1971. This very impressive record of war and peacetime service is skilfully illustrated throughout the visit to the ship. From action against the *Scharnhorst* re-enacted in the Operations Room to videos of D-Day and narratives of experiences in the Artic, together with much more about the history and active life of this ship.

All in our group embarked upon a pretty comprehensive tour of the ship from the impressive armament of 4 turrets of 3 six-inch guns, 4 twin four-inch guns to the boiler and engine rooms.

Some of us were disappointed that so little radar equipment was accessible, but we all discovered equipment we had worked upon over the years from PPIs and JUA displays in the Ops Room to an FH4 and a FMB (older direction finding gear) in the Wireless and EW office.

Some of the tableaux were reminiscent of the scenes one has often observed when setting to work equipments on the larger ships: cooks at work in the galley and bakery; a senior rating in the mail room, and a scene not many of us ever saw – a dentist administering treatment, complete with appropriate sound effects!



Our time on board passed by so quickly that we could hardly believe it was approaching 1515 hours and time to assemble in the shop at the gangway for the journey back to Victoria. On arrival we did, however, have time for tea and cakes before departure on the 1630 coach to Portsmouth.

In this era of expensive tours and entertainment it is worth noting that by taking advantage of group rates the day cost each of us £16.30. That was excluding the bottles of wine, coffee and sandwiches with a variety of fillings, and of course, later, the tea and cakes! The "all-day breakfast" sandwich is not, however, recommended by Ivan Winter who attributes a period of

unaccustomed swift mobility the following day to its consumption!

Nevertheless, from the comments received by telephone and Email, later that week, everyone had enjoyed the day in HMS Belfast.

RON KIMBER Lt RN Rtd Obituary



We were saddened and shocked to hear that Ron, a keen supporter of the WSTG Reunion group, had died suddenly on Sunday 30th September several days short of his 76th Birthday. Ron was from Sheerness and began his career in the Royal Navy in 1947 as an Electrical Artificer Apprentice. Following training and service in the Portsmouth area he married Betty, a Gosport lass, and set down roots in this area, living in Fareham for well over forty years. Throughout his career and retirement years he was a keen swimmer and a qualified ASA official and water polo referee.

Ron Kimber served on, and was associated with, so many ships that such a list would take sometime to compile; however it must be said that his links with WSTG started in the early 1960's in HMS Devonshire

where Ron was the Seaslug TSO. To our older members who worked on that missile system he was well known and a popular officer. At the end of his career he served within WSTG dealing with Part 4 Programmes for numerous ships. Cliff Grainger recalls this time in Ron's career and their long chats at the Part 4 group reunions.

Ron retired from WSTG in 1991.

Ron's interest in sport, as a keen supporter of the Kent cricket team and eventually Pompey FC, led to regular visits to Fratton Park with WSTG's John Farmer and Collingwood's Museum curator Bill Legg.

Most of us will remember Ron as a most caring person who remained a good friend of our late colleague Derrick Middleton BEM. He would always give us (the committee) an assessment of Derrick's health, and whether he would be capable of attending any forthcoming reunion.

Ron's company will be sorely missed at our future events.

At the Funeral Service of Thanksgiving for Ron's life, where there was "standing room only" for many retired naval and civilian colleagues the Padre ensured it was not a sombre event, but one of individual remembrance.

WSTG was represented by Tony Morriss, Rod Waldron, David Lockley, Geoffrey White and Ken Wingate. Cliff Grainger was unavoidably on detached duty.

Our sympathy and thoughts are with Ron's wife and family at this time.

A WSTG VISIT TO TANGMERE MILITARY AVIATION MUSEUM



After some time in the planning fourteen of us, including Jan Barton, Fay Durant and Mary Meakin gathered on the site of the old Battle of Britain airfield at 11.00 on the 25th Sept. 2007. Having already informed the staff of our visit we enjoyed all available discounts and they also ensured that there were plenty of museum volunteers on site to show us round. These proved to be very knowledgeable chaps of our vintage who showed some patience



when dealing with the large school parties dashing about. The museum of course deals in some detail with the Battle of Britain and has examples of the spitfire and hurricane, all thankfully under cover. Another theme is based around Neville Duke, a staunch supporter of the museum until his recent death. His red 1953 Hawker Hunter which captured the world speed record is

housed in the museum along with many artefacts from the Hunter. The ease with which the gunpack could be changed compared to the Supermarine Swift was described by

one of the staff, an ex-pilot. Examples of the Swift and Meteor, again a record breaker from 1946 and English Electric Lightning were to be seen, the latter with many covers off, demonstrating its complexity. Not under cover were the American F4 Phantom, T33, Sea Vixen and a pair of helicopters, a Wessex and Whirlwind. The Meteor Mk 8, a stalwart of the RAF in the 1940s and 50s completed the outside group.

Although these larger exhibits steal the show there is a myriad of smaller items from an ejector seat to a Morrison shelter - all of interest. Moreover, the museum has a library available for research and to those interested in more detail.

For anyone in need of a break a small café the "NAAFI" provided sustenance. We made use of this half way through our visit, and one of our number ordered sausage egg and a large quantity of chips. At the end of the visit all agreed it was a place of great interest and some were planning a visit with the grandchildren. Those of us last to leave had the pleasure of a flying display by a pair of Harvards over the old airfield.