

PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS – KEN WATERSON

The following pages are taken from the BBC SERIES “WW2 PEOPLES WAR”. Apart from changes to the layout these pages have not been changed in any way and the copyright remains that of the author, Kenneth Waterson. However, I have been unable to make contact with Ken so I have taken a chance that as this is the HMS RELENTLESS website, he won't mind his story being available to shipmates old and new.

Sam185

THE STORY OF MY LIFE ON BOARD THE DESTROYER H.M.S RELENTLESS 1944/1945

By Kenneth Waterson. Ordinary Telegraphist

CHAPTER 1

H.M.S. Relentless was completed in 1942. The flotilla comprised of 8 destroyers all with names beginning with the letter R. Their names are as follows: Rotherham, Roebuck, Rocket, Relentless, Redoubt, Rapid, Raider and Racehorse. The leader was Rotherham and the half leaders Roebuck and Racehorse. The flotilla leader was a captain by rank, the coveted Captain (D), (D) standing for destroyer. He was a junior flag officer and had his separate quarters on board. He had a captain to command the Rotherham whether he was on board or not. Captain (D) had an office ashore and his own cabin on HMS Rotherham. His position was that of a junior Commodore, the Commodore's position was that of a junior Admiral. Rotherham was 20 tons heavier than her sister ships, this was no doubt due to the extra Captain (D)'s quarters.

The flotilla, by numbers it was the 11th, there was also a Commodore (D), the head of all the flotillas in the Far Eastern Fleet. Also he had a large signal staff. As they spent a large part of their time ashore at the Commodore's HQ they were as keen as mustard to go to sea and wanted to do the entire signaling etc: His ship was H.M.S. Napier, which of course had its own captain. It no doubt had quarters for the Commodore. He only went to sea for big jobs. On some of these, when his own ship was having a refit, he came aboard the Relentless The captains of the half leaders (the Roebuck and the Racehorse) were Commanders in rank. They did not have captains of ships under them; they had to command their own ships. Presumably they were the deputy leaders of the flotilla. Four of the other ships had captains whose rank was Lieutenant Commander. H.M.S. Rocket had a full Lieutenant as captain, a grade below that of Lieutenant Commander. He must have been the junior captain (due no doubt for promotion).

There were 3 watch keepers on board the Relentless, officers who could sail the ship. I don't think the Captain was included in the three but he would have a watch keeping certificate. He was there on entering and leaving harbour and at all other important occasions. Otherwise he was always on call in his cabin. When he was on the bridge all the Petty Officers seemed to turn to their stations. How they knew he had gone on the bridge I do not know. He had speaking tubes to all parts of the ship. They wanted to be available to him should he want to speak to their department.

The specifications of the Relentless were:

Laid down 20th June 1941 at John Brown's Yard, Glasgow; launched 13th July 1942; completed 30th

PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS – KEN WATERSON

November 1942

1705 tons; length 358 ¼'; width 35'8"; draught 20 ½'

40,000 horsepower; geared turbines; 2 shafts

Speed designed 36¾ knots; full speed at deep draught 31½ knots

Endurance at 15 knots 5,800 miles; at full speed 1350 miles

Main and auxiliary fuel capacity 615 tons

Main guns 4 x 4.7"

Anti aircraft guns 6 x 20mm Oerlikons single mountings 4 x 2 pounder pom poms in quadruple mounting (abaft funnel)

Torpedoes 2 QR 21" C.L. firing tubes; 8 MK.IX. torpedoes

Depth charges release gears 1 rail; 4 throwers; 70 depth charges with T.S.D.S.

Submarine detector C.S.A. A/S (A.S.D.I.C. (Ping Pong))

Complement approximately 200 crew

The food was generally good apart from the "proverbial destroyer breakfast" which consisted of a cup of tea, a cigarette and a good cough. Actually at the beginning of each sea trip there was available a slice of bread, butter and jam, whilst stocks lasted.

The messing arrangements were "canteen messing" which meant each mess prepared its own food for the one cook to cook it. Any baking had to be prepared on the mess deck. Each mess was given an allowance and bought its own food from a central point. If we overspent we had to make it up out of our own pocket; but if we underspent we got a shareout. Mostly we broke even.

One of the telegraphists had been promoted to Leading Telegraphist and I had come to replace him. He left for another posting. There were four Telegraphists and one Petty Officer Telegraphist on the ships complement. Also there were three Signalers, a Leading Signaler, and a Yeoman of Signals, a Petty Officer. Also in the mess were some Quarter Masters and their mates. They were the people who went about with bosun's pipes giving out the orders of the day. Also they were the helmsmen on cruising stations and orderlies of the watch. Also there were two Coders, one of whom had been promoted Leading Coder and who had to be replaced in due course. Our mess was number 5 and was down in the forward bowels of the ship. There were about 15 in our mess.

There were two watch keeper's messes, people were more on watch than in the mess. The seamen who were the Quarter Masters and their mates, also had other trades. Mostly they were radar operators. Two were ASDIC operators, Anti Submarine Detector Operators. One was a torpedo [LT] jman, another was an AA (Anti Aircraft) gunner. There were some who did not have another trade, they were just seamen without trades.

When the ship was closed up for Action Stations the Coxswain took the wheel. He had been trained to throw the ship about to dodge bombs etc. He was a Chief Petty Officer. The Quarter Masters etc. stood to where their trades were, e.g. radar sets.

The other mess down in the lower forecastle mess space was where the balance of the watch

PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS – KEN WATERSON

keepers messed. They had about 15 in their mess also. So the two messes down in the “glory hole” had about 30 persons, the communications ratings, the quarter masters and mates, captain’s boat crew, radar operators, ASDIC operators, electricians (torpedo men) and some AA gunners. The quarter masters were Able Seamen and their mates were Ordinary Seamen. The boat crew leader was a Leading Seaman.

Earlier in the year, in February 1944, The Relentless took part in Operation Canned, the object of which was to find and destroy an enemy supply vessel believed to be operating in the South Indian Ocean. The Relentless left Grand Port, Mauritius, on February 8th 1944 and proceeded to her search area. It had been arranged that land based aircraft, CATALINAS, would cooperate in the search and after contact had been made, search of the area commenced. On February 11th 1944 in the afternoon, Relentless received the aircraft’s first sighting report and altered course to intercept. Contact was made with the enemy vessel in the evening and was seen to be the tanker CHARLOTTE SCHLIEMANN which began drastic avoiding action. Relentless closed at speed of 30 knots to within 2000 yards on the port beam of the tanker and fired 8 torpedoes. Gun fire with main armament was then opened but ceased as three torpedoes hit, causing explosions in the tanker. Her back was seen to be broken and she sank in 10 minutes. 41 survivors out of a crew of 88 were picked up by the Relentless.

The Charlotte Schliemann had been to Tokyo and was on its way back to Germany. She had a 6” gun and could have sunk the Relentless before the latter could have got within range. The Relentless closed at such high speed that she created such a bow wave that made her appear to be a cruiser. The Charlotte Schliemann turned tail and fled. The German had been sought by the Royal Navy for some time and several ships had had a go at her but missed her.

Relentless fired her 8 torpedoes in a fan shape, 3 of which struck home. The hull of the German popped up upside down and the Relentless thought it was a submarine. In the meantime scramble nets had been put over the side of Relentless for the 41 out of 88 German sailors to scramble up. Unfortunately one who gave the Nazi salute as he came over the side was kicked back into the sea and left to drown by a seaman from Liverpool who had had his wife and child killed in a bombing raid. All those who were on watch at the time received some form of recognition. I think the Captain got the D.S.O., the Torpedo Officer similar, the Torpedo Petty Officer a medal and the torpedo man similar. The Radar Operator got a medal and the Petty Officer Telegraphist got mentioned in dispatches for reading the German’s distress message and sending it in, from which their code was broken. The prisoners were housed in the watch keepers’ mess, the watch keepers moved out elsewhere. One seaman dropped his revolver down their hatchway when he was standing guard at the top of their gangway. They brought it back up to him handle first. The prisoners were handed over to the French in Madagascar where they were treated badly.

The Relentless took part in Operation Crimson. This was carried out on July 25th 1944 and it bombarded Sabang, the Japanese naval base in Northern Sumatra. The Relentless, with

PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS – KEN WATERSON

Commodore A. L. Poland flying his pendant, was part of a large force which took part. The Relentless was a unit of the anti-submarine screen to the battleships and took part in the bombardment of the coastal defences. It is interesting to note that this was the first time that the British Eastern Fleet, operating off the Burmese and Malayan Coasts as distinct from the Pacific Ocean, had turned to the offensive in the naval war against Japan.

The ships taking part were:

1 x Fleet Aircraft Carrier Illustrious Class - Victorious

23,000 tons; length 753'; width 95'; draught 24'

110,000 horsepower; turbines; triple screw (propellers); 31 knots

Dual purpose guns 16 x 4.5" (anti ship and anti aircraft)

54 aircraft

2 x Battleships Queen Elizabeth Class - Queen Elizabeth, Valiant

27,000 tons; length 645 $\frac{3}{4}$ '; width 90 $\frac{1}{2}$ '; draught 29 $\frac{1}{2}$ '

75,000 horsepower; turbines; 24 knots

Main guns 8 x 15"; dual purpose 20 x 4.5" (twin mountings) (anti ship and anti aircraft)

Light AA guns (anti aircraft)

4 x 21" torpedoes

Aircraft catapult

1 x Battle Cruiser - Renown

26,500 tons; length 794'; width 90'; draught 25 $\frac{3}{4}$ '

112,000 horsepower; turbines; 31 $\frac{1}{2}$ knots

Forced draught 126,000 horsepower; 32 $\frac{1}{2}$ knots

Main guns 6 x 15"; dual purpose 20 x 4.5" (anti ship and anti aircraft)

Light AA guns (anti aircraft) 3 x 8 barrel 2 pounder pom poms

Aircraft catapult; 1 sea plane

1 x French Battleship - Richelieu

Laid down 22nd October 1935 at Brest Arsenal; launched 17th January 1939; completed 1941

35,000 tons; length 794'; width 108 $\frac{1}{2}$ '; draught 26'10"

150,000 horsepower; geared turbines

Designed speed 31 $\frac{1}{2}$ knots; full speed at deep draught 31 knots

Fuel capacity 6,200 tons

Main guns 8 x 15" guns (quadruple turrets); 15 x 6" HA/LA guns (High angle/Low angle)

AA guns (Anti aircraft) 12 x 3.9" (twins); 12 x 1.46"

4 aircraft; 2 catapults

PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS – KEN WATERSON

Complement 60 officers, 1500 men

1 x 8" Heavy Cruiser County Class - Cumberland

9850 tons; length 630'; width 68 ¼'; draught 16 ¼'

80,000 horsepower; turbines; 31½ knots

Main guns 8 x 8"

AA guns (Anti aircraft) 8 x 4"; 4 x 2 pounders (replaced?)

Torpedoes 8 x 21"

Aircraft 4

4 x 6" Belted (Belt Armour) Cruisers Colony Class - Gambia, Kenya, Nigeria

8000 tons; length 555 ½'; width 62'; draught 16 ½'

72,500 horsepower; turbines; 33 knots

Main guns 12 x 6"

AA guns (Anti aircraft) 8 x 4"; various light AA guns

Torpedoes 6 x 21"

Aircraft 3

Ceylon

8800 tons; length 555 ½'; width 62'; draught 16 ½'

72,500 horsepower; turbines; 33 knots

Main guns 9 x 6"

AA guns (Anti aircraft) 10 x 4"; various light AA guns

Torpedoes 6 x 21"

Aircraft none

1 x 5.25" Belted (Belt Armour) Cruiser Dido Class - Phoebe

5450 tons; length 512'; width 50 ½'; draught 14'

62,000 horsepower; turbines; 33 knots

Main guns 8 x 5.25" dual purpose (anti ship and anti aircraft)

Secondary gun 1 x 4"

AA guns (Anti aircraft) 8 x 2 pounders

Torpedoes 6 x 21"

1 x Dutch Light Cruiser - Tromp - Flotilla Leader

Laid down 22nd January 1936 at Netherlands S.B.Co, Amsterdam;

launched 25th May 1937; completed August 1938

3350 tons; length 433'1"; width 40'8"; draught 17 ¾'

56,000 horsepower; turbines; 32½ knots designed; 35 knots achieved Endurance at 35 knots, 1400

PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS – KEN WATERSON

miles; at 12 knots, 6000 miles

Fuel capacity 880 tons

Main guns 6 x 5.9"

Secondary guns 2 x 3"

AA guns (Anti aircraft) 4 x 1.57"; 4 x 0.46mm

Torpedoes 2 x 21"

Aircraft 1 float plane

Complement 27 officers, 307 men

9 x Destroyers Q & R Class - Quality, Quickmatch, Racehorse, Raider, Rapid, Relentless, Rocket, Roebuck, Rotherham (Flotilla Leader)

Laid down 1940/1 at John Brown's / Scott's / Cammell Laird / Hawthorn Leslie's and Swan Hunter's yards

Launched 1941/2; completed 1942/3

1705 tons (Rotherham 1725 tons); length 358 ¼'; width 35'8"; draught 20 ½'

40,000 horsepower; geared turbines; 2 shafts

Speed designed 36¾ knots; full speed at deep draught 31½ knots

Endurance at 15 knots, 5800 miles; at full speed, 1350 miles

Main and auxiliary fuel capacity 615 tons

Main guns 4 x 4.7"

AA guns (Anti aircraft) 4 x 2 pounder pom poms in quadruple mountings; 6 x 20mm Oerlikon single mountings (Rocket and Roebuck 4 x 20mm Oerlikon twin power mountings)

Torpedoes 2 Q.R. 21" tubes; 8 Mk IX torpedoes

Depth charges 1 rail; 4 throwers; 70 charges with T.S.D.S. (Rotherham 2 rails, 4 throwers, 70 charges)

Submarine detector C.S.A. A/S (A.S.D.I.C. (Ping Pong))

2 x Submarines T Class (Air Sea Rescue) - Tantalus, Templar

1090 tons surface/1575 tons submerged; length 275'; width 26 ½'

Surface - horsepower 2500; engine diesel; speed 15½ knots

Submerged - horsepower 1450; engine electric; speed 9 knots

Guns 1 x 4"

Torpedoes 10 x 21" (8 bow, 2 stern)

THE STORY OF MY LIFE ON BOARD THE DESTROYER H.M.S RELENTLESS 1944/1945

By Kenneth Waterson. Ordinary Telegraphist

CHAPTER 2

PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS – KEN WATERSON

On the September 10th we arrived at Colombo for repairs in the dry dock. A wash house was set up on the dock side with a free gangway to visit it. All the water and waste pipes were shut off and the ship was high and dry in the dock. There was plenty of shore leave, just for the afternoon. The w/t (wireless/telegraphy) watches were closed down and a telephone was installed on board to cover in its place.

Whilst we were in dry dock the ship had her boilers cleaned and her bottom scraped and painted with red oxide.

Just before the Americans invaded the Philippines, the British Eastern Fleet took part in Operation Millet. The Eastern Fleet strike force consisted of:

2 x Illustrious Class Fleet Aircraft Carriers - Victorious, Indomitable

23,000 tons; length 753'; width 95'; draught 24'

110,000 horsepower; turbines; triple screw (propellers); 31 knots

Dual purpose guns 16 x 4.5" (anti ship and anti aircraft)

54 aircraft

1 x Battle Cruiser - Renown

26,500 tons; length 794'; width 90'; draught 25 $\frac{3}{4}$ '

112,000 horsepower; turbines; 31 $\frac{1}{2}$ knots

Forced draught 126,000 horsepower; 32 $\frac{1}{2}$ knots

Main guns 6 x 15"; dual purpose 20 x 4.5" (anti ship and anti aircraft)

Light AA guns (anti aircraft) 3 x 8 barrel 2 pounder pom poms

Aircraft catapult; 1 sea plane

3 x Heavy Cruisers County Class - Cumberland, London, Suffolk

9750 to 9850 tons; length 630' (London 633'); width 68 $\frac{1}{4}$ ' (London 66'); draught 16 $\frac{1}{4}$ ' (London 17')

80,000 horsepower; turbines; 31 $\frac{1}{2}$ knots (London 32 $\frac{1}{2}$ knots)

Main guns 8 x 8"

AA guns (Anti aircraft) 8 x 4"; 4 x 2 pounders (replaced?)

Torpedoes 8 x 21"

Aircraft 4 (London 3)

1 x 5.25" Belted (Belt Armour) Cruiser Dido Class - Phoebe

5450 tons; length 512'; width 50 $\frac{1}{2}$ '; draught 14'

62,000 horsepower; turbines; 33 knots

Main guns 8 x 5.25" dual purpose (anti ship and anti aircraft)

Secondary gun 1 x 4"

AA guns (Anti aircraft) 8 x 2 pounders

Torpedoes 6 x 21"

PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS – KEN WATERSON

11 x Destroyers

Dutch Ship - Van Galen (Ex N Class Destroyer Noble 1942)

N Class - Norman

1690 tons; length 356 ½'; width 35 ¾'; draught 20½'

Main guns 6 x 4.7" (double turrets)

AA guns (Anti aircraft) 4 x 2 pounders; other smaller guns

Torpedoes 10 x 21"

Q and R Class - Queensborough, Quiberon, Quillian, Raider, Relentless 1705 tons; length 358 ¼'; width 35'8"; draught 20 ½'

Main guns 4 x 4.7" (single turrets)

AA guns (Anti aircraft) 4 x 2 pounder pom poms; 6 x 20mm Oerlikon single mountings (Quillian 4 x 20mm Oerlikon twin mountings)

Torpedoes 8 x 21"

Depth charges 1 rail; 4 throwers; 70 charges with T.S.D.S. (Quillian 2 rails, 2 throwers, 75 charges)

Submarine Detector C.S.A. A/S (A.S.D.I.C. (Ping Pong))

W Class - Wager, Wakeful, Wessex, Whelp

1730 tons; length 362 ¾'; width 35 ¾'; draught 20½'

Main guns 4 x 4.7"

AA guns (Anti aircraft) - various

Torpedoes 8 x 21"

All N, Q, R and W Class

40,000 horsepower; turbines; 2 shafts; 36 knots

Submarine detectors C.S.A. A/S (A.S.D.I.C. (Ping Pong))

2 Submarines for air/sea rescue [I think]

Operation Millet was an operation to carry out an air strike and bombardment of selected airfields and shore targets against centers in the Nicobar Islands. Relentless acted as escort to the two carriers and also took part in the bombardment of a radar station at Car Nicobar. The Nicobar Islands lie off the Burmese Coast. The Commodore (D) in charge of the British Eastern Fleet destroyers was Commodore (D) A. L. Poland. His flag ship, the Napier, an N class destroyer, was being refitted so he commandeered the Relentless to go to sea on. He brought his staff with him who did all the work, his communication ratings were as keen as mustard, they did not get the chance to go to sea much. They normally operated from the Commodore's HQ ashore. .

. When they came aboard us we kept four watches, which was easier going than two watches which we had to do when we were on our own operations. There was a Warrant Telegraphist who came on board and ruled the W/T (Wireless Telegraph) Office when the Commodore was on board. He used to give us the run around. His rank was one above that of Chief Petty Officer

PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS – KEN WATERSON

Telegraphist.

There was a lot of saluting going on then. I never actually saw the Commodore. His staff quartered with us and it was very cramped. On the way to the Nicobar Islands various exercises were carried out. On one occasion we were detached with the two light cruisers and they seemed to “show off” to the Commodore by criss-crossing our bow at high speed. We could have left them standing because we could do 36 knots whilst they could only do 33. Perhaps we were conserving our fuel as they had bigger reserves than us. The planes took off from the carriers several times and made some sorties. When they returned there was usually a mishap. A plane would overshoot the landing deck and ditch into the sea. A launch would be lowered to pick up the pilot who seemed to be unscathed. The plane of course sank and was lost. Sometimes there would be two planes lost from one sortie.

When we got there, an air strike was made. Then the battleships cruised past firing their big guns, after that the cruisers did their shoot and finally the destroyers put in their pot shots led by the Commodore. A lot of trees were knocked down and a lot of grass was on fire. We saw 1 Jap plane shot down with the loss of 2 of ours. During the action the ships regular communications ratings (us) sat on top of the galley under the protection of the back of the bridge and had a grandstand view. It was like going to the pictures except it was for real. We were told to keep under cover by a roving Petty Officer, detailed to do just that because debris was dropping down from the skies, spent bullets and the like. One pilot was shot down in the sea and lost. The other pilot landed on the island and was taken prisoner and almost immediately beheaded on the shore.

One seaman washed his hammock by putting it over the stern on a long rope. He left it there all afternoon. It was very clean when it came out. I still had all my kit except my old blues which I gave to the gunners to clean their guns. Out of my clothing allowance of 5d per day I replaced my old blues. Also I had bought some personal gear, lightweight shirts, shorts, underwear and socks even some swimming trunks.

I caught ring worms, little rings of sores on the legs, arms, neck and face; also I had dobery rash in the crutch; in addition I had Chinese foot rot between the toes. Apparently all these sore infections came from profuse sweating. I had to report every day for a week to have them painted with a very strong solution that was bright purple in colour. The paint stung very much and was increased daily by the Petty Officer sick berth attendant who was determined to stamp it out. There were about half a dozen of us and we all stood in what sea breeze we could find and jumped up and down with our pants at half mast for 10 minutes until the sting, 10 times stronger than that of iodine, died down. I also caught “Crabs”, little mites that burrow into the skin around the genitals. For that I had to shave off all the pubic hairs. Doing that sliced their heads off and cured the infection. After that it was no more sitting down on the lavatory seats. I had some trouble with one ear and had to have treatment for it.

There was not much to do on board ship in the way of recreation. A tom bola session was held

PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS – KEN WATERSON

every dog watch but that cost money. There was a ships' piano but no-one played it. There was a ships' library. I had enough clothes to only wash them every third day. They were washed in a bucket and hung up on the upper deck when fine or in the stoke hole when wet. My watch strap broke again, it rotted through with sweat. So I put my watch in the ships office for safe keeping. . I had been drinking some ice cold water which was very nice but made one's tummy ache. They must have installed an ice machine on board We only had to work in the forenoons, having every afternoon off - tropical routine, but had to keep watches throughout, normally four. Four watches meant you had four hours on and twelve hours off, except dog watches which were two hours on and sometimes ten hours off. If they did not have dog watches you would be on duty the same time every day which could have meant 12 midnight to 4 in the morning every day for someone. Two watches meant four hours on and four hours off which was grueling if you had to read Morse at 20 words per minute for any length of time.

Now we did a lot of sea time. We did various different jobs. A regular one was to escort troop ships coming up from Australia and see them safely into Bombay. It was usually one escort to one troopship. The troops were American.

On one occasion we went to Calcutta. We did not go into the harbour, we stood out to sea. Land was not in sight but one could see where the river ran into the sea which was yellow in colour, presumably that was the colour of the sand being washed out to sea.

On another occasion for some reason we stopped at Adu Atoll in The Maldives. The ship heaved to and we were given permission to go over the side for a swim. Two seamen were mounted with rifles one forward and one aft. Their job was to shoot any sharks that might appear. I did not know at the time but The Maldives was the home base for one species of sharks. When the tide came in the island we were next to was covered by the sea. Then we sailed on.

I had a weeks' leave. The whole communications staff was transported in a launch round the coast from Trinco harbour not very far away. I think the destroyer was tied up alongside the Woolwich for another boiler clean. We were supplied every day by launch with our food. Canteen messing still applied so we had to do our own preparation, the leading hand did the baking and the hands prepared the basics, such as potato peeling.

We were on a beach under palm trees. There was swimming in the surf in a pleasant bay and games of football. I saw monkeys in the trees, mongoose on the forest floor, some deer, snakes and plenty of insects. Also here were sponges floating in the sea. A couple of natives came every day to wash our clothes for us. I bought three dozen bananas and ate them. We all had a lazy time even if we did get a lot of insect bites.

Our huts were made of dried palm tree leaves. Grog was supplied to all the others but I was under 20 so did not get any. On board I got lime juice but not in this camp. There was plenty of fresh fruit however. We were given instructions on something in the forenoon and dog watches. On rising we dashed down to the beach, five yards away and had an early morning swim in the beautiful bay.

PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS – KEN WATERSON

Breakfast followed having been prepared by one of the lads plus a native. After stand easy we would go for a walk in the jungle. Another walk in the jungle after dinner at noon, sometimes someone would have a firearm and take a pot shot at a baboon or two. Then there would be more swimming.

Our duty party that unloaded our provisions had to wade ashore with them in the surf. Sometimes the odd loaf was dropped and floated out to sea. We also washed our mess table and chairs in the surf. In the evenings we would stroll along the beach or have a sing song in the hut. We played football in a field not between the huts or the latter would have collapsed. This holiday would cost a lot of money in civil life but the trimmings would be of a much higher standard. It would be like going to the West Indies from Europe for a tropical holiday; or to Bali from Australia. It was idyllic, sea, sun, sand and surf.

After the leave we had at Trincomalee we went back to sea. One hard trip sticks out in my mind. A submarine was struck down with cholera just off the Burmese coast. We were sent out with a spare submarine crew, 80 men and officers and a captain who was senior to our own. The sea was heavy and east of 90 degrees east we were living like gypsies on the upper deck; all below was battened down. We lived on corned beef sandwiches which were good. The cook made them as he had no cooking to do and none was done. We went into two watches.

When we got to our rendezvous we could hardly see the submarine. The waves obscured it. In a very choppy sea the whaler was lowered and the doctor rowed across about half a mile. That was hard going for the five man whaler crew. It stayed for about half an hour then came back without the doctor. All that the submarine wanted was a doctor so we turned round and made for home (Trincomalee). The sea was green by the submarine that was reflected by trees. We must have been near the coast but we could not see land. The ship had been permanently closed up for action stations, everybody had been at their respective stations. All hatches were shut, all sea doors closed. The supply lines to the ships magazine were opened, which were intriguing. A series of pulleys and wires ran from the magazine to each gun going through decks and. Messes including the Officers Ward Room. There was an ammunition locker by each gun holding so many shells until the supply pulleys could be set up. These were for immediate use at ordinary times. The forecastle must have been heading into the swell. At first the waves broke over the forecastle, then they broke over the bridge, after that water started coming down the speaking tube into the W/T (Wireless Telegraphy) office. Someone had left the cover off it on the bridge. I was on watch at the time and had ice cold water swilling round my ankles. It felt like ice cold water in the hot office. Not only that, the coder in the corner was as sick as a dog; then his vomit slapped around my ankles. It was the middle watch, my morale was low.

We altered course and the water stopped coming down the speaking tube. We were still not out of the woods. On the way back we had a line up the length of the ship to hang on to when going aft. One of the other coders was in the sick bay which was aft. When I was on cooks I took his meals

PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS – KEN WATERSON

to him, somehow I held his meal on a plate in one hand and held on to the rope (life line) with the other. What worried me was that the railings round the ship's decks were deflected into horizontal position round the torpedo area, which was just before the aft mess house where the sick berth was situated. The ship's railings were deflected into horizontal position around the torpedo tubes and the gun emplacements . It made for easier gunnery but was hazardous in rough weather when one could get pitched over the side. In the aft of the ship were more seamen's messes, X and Y gun crew and torpedo men. In addition there was the Chief Petty Officer's mess and two or three cabins for officers. Also I think there was a mess for Engine Room Artificers as the gear room was more aft than for'wd. Eventually we made it back to Trincomalee none the worse for our ordeal. The next trip was to take reliefs to a listening post on Cocos or Christmas Island, more likely the latter. This is to the south west of Bali where I went for a holiday years later. We took some telegraphists who could read Japanese Morse and a troop ship full of 200 marines to guard them. We were at the island for the day and a Jap plane came over to see what we were up to. It flew away after circulating round. I expected at least an air attack but I suppose we were not worth them expending their meagre resources at that time.

PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS – KEN WATERSON

THE STORY OF MY LIFE ON BOARD THE DESTROYER H.M.S RELENTLESS 1944/1945

By Kenneth Waterson. Ordinary Telegraphist

CHAPTER 3

We took on board the relieved crew, they were R.A.F. wireless operators. However we left the troop ship at the island. At first thought the R.A.F. blokes had no guards but I suspect the R.A.F. regiment was there and they would hand over to the Marines. This hand over would take some time and there would be supplies to unload as well. Presumably some other destroyer would bring them back. I think the Japanese airfield was Denpasar in Bali, where I landed years later on holiday in 1994. We also picked up an American officer with the R.A.F. squad. He lived in the Officers' Mess but walked all over the ship for exercise. I do not know why but he wore a pair of pistols on his hips on his exercise walks; whether it was the fear of a Jap climbing over the side from out of the sea or fear of the crew. The other officers just recreated on B gun deck and walked from side to side in short lengths. They never ventured to any other part of the ship except on duty. Myself, I rarely ever saw an officer, never being on duty on the bridge.

There was just one other incident on the way back. During the first watch at about 21.00 two off duty seamen were having a smoke on the quarter deck when they swore that they saw a torpedo track pass behind us. Nobody believed them but I was not so sure. If they were right the lookout on duty missed seeing it. It was on this trip I noticed a new leading seaman wearing his seaman's knife on his lanyard round his waist with the blade open. It was ready to cut the life floats free. He must have had a cause in the past to do that. I did not know that one's seaman's knife was housed on the end of one's lanyard. The lanyard was part of No.1 dress as far as I knew and had to be whiter than white when worn round one's neck.

By now I had got accustomed to sea time. I had got used to the destroyer rolling on a flat sea. It was the pitching that was difficult, going up and down as if on a lift. My ring worms had gone and my ear trouble cleared up. That had been caused by getting seawater in my ear when I was swimming. When I cut down on swimming my ear trouble went away. We had a film show on board every time we put into harbour now. The weather was cooler and wetter. I had given over washing my hair as much as it was coming out. Now I was using plenty of Brillcreem. I had a cold through sleeping in a draught. Also I was getting plump through the lack of exercise.

Before Christmas 1944 we had been in dry dock in Bombay and been in Trincomalee Harbour for two weeks. A lot of water polo was played and quiz games held between messes. .On Christmas Day we went to sea, it was someone's duty to patrol outside Trincomalee Harbour and I think we lost the toss for it. All the other ships in the harbour gave us a long cheer as we went by them on our way out. We had a good day and plenty to eat. Our Christmas dinner consisted of a small portion of turkey, stuffing, roast potatoes, mint sauce, plum duff and mince pie. Tea was ordinary with

PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS – KEN WATERSON

Christmas cake that did not rise as much as it should. Supper was hard to face, it was boiled potatoes, apple sauce, cold pork and peas.

There was a church service in the morning and the rest of the day was treated like Sunday. Later in the morning rounds were made. Rounds were the inspection of the ships living quarters. These rounds were not the proper ones. First came the junior AB (Able Seaman) dressed in the Coxswain's uniform (the senior non-commissioned officer on board). Next came the junior OD (Ordinary Seaman) dressed as the Captain. The midshipman came dressed as a Full Lieutenant. There followed a gang of officers dressed up in silly clothes. Then the Captain came with his 2½ rings of ranks showing. Finally the junior stoker came dressed up as the Chief Stoker. Everyone had borrowed uniforms to denote their Christmas Day ranks. One officer carried a very large bag in which he was supposed to have presents for every mess in the ship. He brought a very little parcel with just a little something in it. All the presents were so small he could have put them all in one pocket. The Engineer (a Lieutenant) was wearing a lamp shade upside down and he was muttering away in "gibberish" like a Turk. The day passed on very nicely. I had the last dog watch - 6pm-8pm - which was not bad, it followed my previous watch of 4am-8am, yes 4am-8am, on Christmas morning 1944.

As regards pay I was getting one shilling (5p) a day extra for Far Eastern Campaign and sixpence (2½p) a day for Tropical Pay. As yet I did not qualify for long service award which was another shilling (5p) a day after three years service. We got three shillings (15p) cheer money for Christmas with which the mess bought fresh and tinned fruit.

After Christmas we went back to Bombay, our flotilla leader's ship HMS Rotherham went into dry dock this time. We gave a gunnery display to about 200 Combined Operation Officers from Burma. Also I had a temporary filling to a tooth made by a lady dentist. At least she did notice that I needed a filling. Two other dentists previously found nothing wrong with my teeth. Unfortunately the filling came out soon after she had done it. I go every six months now to have my teeth checked, it is free. I had been eating a lot of fruit, tinned and fresh, and had been doing a lot more swimming. If one swims one misses one's afternoon nap. Swimming makes one tired but is good exercise I had been swimming in a lagoon and had caught the sun, also I had swum in some public baths which were very salty and burned my nose. . We got tins of pears, apricots and grapefruit in the canteen. The NAAFI manager held the honorary rank of Petty Officer and opened his store twice a day for an hour each time. I had my photograph taken in the streets and developed within 10 minutes. I finished up having a supper of green salad, tomatoes, onions and spring lettuce. We were getting plenty of ice cream and fruit salads, pink ice cream cold but nice. Also there were iced coffees, iced sodas and iced chocolate available ashore and it is a wonder we did not get upset stomachs as the locals were not all that fussy on hygiene. One walks slow so as not to sweat too much. I had slept on the upper deck but there had been a monsoon and my hammock was wet through. I had to dry it down in the stokers' boiler room.

PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS – KEN WATERSON

We were practicing for a fleet regatta; whaling boats were rowing up and down at fantastic speeds. Our ship was not doing so very well.

Bombay is oriental and rather dirty. There were some high class shops and picture houses, cafes and refreshment bars all of very good standard. The beggars in the street soil your clothes touching one begging for money. They were a pest. One could buy anything and things were cheap. I bought a few things, wallets, cigarette case, handkerchiefs, buttons, buckles, cotton khaki and navy blue shorts for every day wear. Also I bought a tin trunk to keep my kit in and cockroaches out. Finally I bought an embroidered cloth of the Taj Mahal. I saw quite a few pictures, “The Cobra Woman”, “Dream Island” and “Ghost Catchers”. By now I was broke but had shown my new pal the sights of Bombay. I had spent my savings of 12 Pounds in five days. We were amused watching a Chinese couple eat with their chopsticks in a Chinese restaurant we were in. We had knives and forks for our egg and chips. They bent their heads to within a few inches above their plate and chop sticks their food in their mouth at close range. People dressed very well apart from the beggars who wore rags and slept on a blanket on the pavement. Coming out of the pictures late in the evenings one had to watch where one put one’s big naval boots else there would be a scream as some poor beggar was trodden upon. All they seemed to eat was various types of grasses. When they washed they washed at a tap in a square. Their lives were those of vagrants, it was said millions lived like that. We started getting paid by the fortnight now instead of monthly as previously. This helped to build up funds again.

After we left Bombay nothing out of the ordinary happened. We must have done ordinary jobs, routine escort and convoy work. Anyway our ship needed a refit, our guns needed re-boring and our engines needed patching up. So we were booked into Simonstown, South Africa, for a couple of months for a refit..

The journey there was interesting. First of all we crossed the Equator and by-passed The Seychelles. The climate got cooler and cooler. It was pleasant not to sweat all the time. At times I even wore a jumper.

The weather worsened and we had to have the life line up on the upper deck. The passage through the Mozambique Channel was very rough for two days. When we reached the Durban Roads (parking lots for ships) we heaved to (parked) a mile from the jetty. A stropky South African ex-boxing champion was put ashore and sent on leave. I think the officers took the micky out of him. He was lowered in the whaler with the crew and they had a mile to row. It was choppy and they were soaked through. All his kit bag was wet. He was dropped on the jetty and the whaler came back, the crew like drowned rats. I don’t know what the South African port officials thought, they must have rubbed their eyes in astonishment.

This South African met another member of the crew in their home town later. Why this second sailor was not sent on leave at the same date with him is not known. However sailor number.2 -who

PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS – KEN WATERSON

appeared white- was seen by sailor number.1 as number.2 was walking down the street with his sister, who was coloured. Number.1 reported number.2 to the authorities and he never came back to the ship. They had both been in the same mess and both were quartermasters and had sat side by side eating their meals. Apartheid!!

We were sleeping with blankets at night it was that much cooler. We were soon in Simonstown Naval Base after leaving Durban. One of the main languages was English. The main town was Capetown about 20 miles away by train. The climate was like sunny Spain/Italy and not much activity. I ate some cheap grapes at 6d (2½p) per lb and some apples at 3d (1½p) each and drank plenty of lager. I even tried some peppermint brandy but did not like it very much. They call them “starboard lights” after the green colour. It gave me a thick head. Now I only had a shower every other day as one does not sweat as much here. Went roller skating in a nearby township, Wynberg I think.

Moored next to us was our sister ship the Roebuck. Her smoke stack was like a pepper pot. She had been shelled by the Japs and B gun was wiped out, 12 ratings killed. One of her jobs had been to go and give a certain installation on the Burmese coast a good shelling every now and then. She heaved to between two landmarks and set her guns at a certain angle and let fly. Unfortunately the Japs brought up a field gun and set the range on Roebuck’s favoured stance. The next time Roebuck went there they pashed her. The ship had to be towed back to Trincomalee.

PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS – KEN WATERSON

THE STORY OF MY LIFE ON BOARD THE DESTROYER H.M.S RELENTLESS 1944/1945

By Kenneth Waterson. Ordinary Telegraphist

CHAPTER 4

There was a dairy in Simonstown where one could buy a glass of milk for 6d (2½p). It did taste good. There was not a lot to do in South Africa and the locals were not very friendly. I went to the pictures and had a few drinks. We swam quite a bit in the sea by the docks which had a shark net all around, I got my hair very matted and had to have most of it cut off to resolve the matting. The ship was refitted. The new captain had a personal bath installed; everyone else had to make do with a shower. The old captain went on to command a submarine. The local ice cream is very good. I had my photograph taken and sent it home by sea mail. It would have cost too much by air mail. It gets very hot at midday but chilly at midnight. Not much rain, reddish brown terrain and green velvety trees.

The first week of the refit was the first week in March and I went ashore once or twice and slept in the Africa Station Club. After that, being broke, I stayed on board in dry dock. The plumbing was off again and we used toilets and wash rooms on the dock side. After roller skating once or twice I did not do much else. All there was to do was drink beer and wine and spirits when one had funds. The locals were suspicious of us which was natural as most of the matelots were a rough lot when drunk.

On March 14th I went on leave for 14 days to a place called Heidelberg, about 180 miles from Capetown. We got on the train in Capetown plus plenty of brandy. Half of our mess went plus half a stokers mess. The journey took 12 hours and was wearisome. We had bunks to sleep in and an observation car at the rear to view the scenery. We got there at 05.30am, had a cup of tea and a sandwich of cheese, and then turned in.

We got up at about 10.00am having breakfast served in the bedroom by the coloured waitress. It was egg and bacon and was appreciated. After that we had a walk and then it was lunch time which consisted of barley soup, tomato stew, steak and chips, prunes and custard followed by coffee. We were in a hotel and it was posher than being on board ship. In the afternoon I had a sleep and then it was dinner time. Dinner consisted of soup, fish, mutton and vegetables, sweet and coffee. In the evening we sat in the lounge, singing and drinking.

The morning after, breakfast was brought up by a coloured boy. I think we should have got up for it. Did nothing in the forenoon, I think we should have gone for a picnic. Lazed away the afternoon in the lounge, it was cold so I put on my serge jumper. In the evening we went for a stroll then sat out on the hotel front. I Went to bed early, did not go to church as they were all Dutch.

March 19th 1945, went down for breakfast and had a walk until noon. Rested in the afternoon when it was hotter and went down for dinner. Read a book after dinner and had a smoke. There is

PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS – KEN WATERSON

hot and cold water in all the bedrooms. All the servants are coloured. Laundry is done every day and costs 2s/- (10p) per fortnight. We get 3 meals per day, breakfast, luncheon and dinner. There were three courses or more at meal times. Drinks could be bought any time in the hotel bar.

March 20th, breakfast was egg and bacon. Then I had another stroll round town. All the days seemed the same. For the second week I went swimming in the mornings followed by a short walk. Then I had another swim in the afternoons. It was too hot to walk in the afternoons. The locals did not take to us at all.

We stayed at Esperanto Hotel Heidelberg, about 200 miles from Capetown. The town was very quiet being about the size of Crawshawbooth (2000 inhabitants). It had a railway station, next to the hotel, single track railway, town hall, three churches, none of which were English. Scenery similar to that of home except there were no houses in the distance, just farm lands. The farmers lived in the town.

There was absolutely nothing to do, just walks, swims or sitting in the sun in the hotel garden. The locals seem to be of Dutch descent, certain sects speak English, all speak Afrikaans. When anyone does speak English it sounds a very thick accent.

The trains were better than ours. They had sleepers on them. In our compartment for six there were six beds. At the rear of the train was a verandah where one could view the passing countryside. It was in the open air and one could cool off there. Dinner was served on the train. In the hotel lunch was at 1pm and dinner at 7pm. This took some getting used to as on board ship dinner was at 12 noon and supper at 6pm. The more courses one had the less one got on each course. There was no tea time, just coffee at 3pm. Breakfast was at 8am in the dining room or 8.45am in the bedroom. One got more if one got up and went downstairs for it.

The weather was always fine, it was late summertime. It was hot and cloudless. The grass was brown after the hot summer sun. The scenery is similar to Rossendale but there are high mountains in the distance. The soil seems good as wheat and many green vegetables for the table are grown. The fields are irrigated, little dykes run down the road and round the fields for water to run out of little gates. The water is red in colour. The cattle and horses are the same as at home except they do not have Clydesdales. The carts for transport are a poor second to Uncle John's muck cart. The fields are the same as his but with more flies and ants.

The hotel was a resting place for the rail crews. They seemed to stop for an hour or so and drink in the bar. Perhaps it was a meal break for them. They had come 200 miles from the Cape but it took them 12 hours, Perhaps they had other breaks on the way up. People who worked in the town but did not have a home there stayed at our hotel. The stationmaster was one such person. He was a Nazi sympathizer and ignored us in the hotel. Another resident was the post-mistress who was an English sympathizer and spoke to us.

This leave ended and we returned to the ship. On April 1st I drew my first tot as I was now 20 years of age. It was a sore point that one could be drowned at sea under 20 years of age but could

PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS – KEN WATERSON

not draw one's tot of rum. At first I felt quite tipsy until tea time. One got a good measure.

I went roller skating again and watched a game of hockey between a girl's team and a boy's team. They must have played one another before because the boys wore shin guards and the girls swiped out with their hockey sticks. The boys were on their honour not to swipe back.

We had a good feed when we got back off leave. There was variety of food on leave but not much in quantity. We must have lived well on board. I was getting fatter. There was a ship's mascot, a dog, but it was mangy and ugly.

When I got back off leave I was sent daily to Klaver camp, the Simonstown Signal School, for a week. I read Morse all day and had procedure lessons. There were a few of us. O/Tel going in for Tel, Tel going in for Tel/TO and Tel/TO going in for Leading Tel. (For O read Ordinary, for Tel read Telegraphist and for TO read Trained Operator). We all took the same examination and I came out top of the class. The signal bosun recommended me for promotion to Leading Telegraphist but my own captain would not recommend me. I did not have enough sea service behind me. As a compromise he authorized my promotion to Tel/TO which was an advance on Tel, the one I had entered for. As a Tel/TO I was promoted Telegraphist on one day then Trained Operator a few weeks later. I think it was my fleet experience that earned me good marks, some of the others did not have that experience. Also I knew how to operate the transmitters and most of the others did not. My extra pay was 1s/3d (6½p) for Telegraphist and 2d (1p) for Trained Operator, a total of 1s/5d (7½p) per day. The TO grading gave the right to put a star above one's butterfly wings. My swimming has improved. I can do ¼ of a mile easily now and ½ a mile with a rest now and then, lying on my back for a breather.

I had received a letter from Taffy, a pal from training days, who was now in an army camp at Barnard Castle. He had transferred to the Army in August 1944 but wished he was back in the Navy. He is in the Tank Corps reading morse at a slower speed. There were one or two who had changed over, whether they volunteered or were conscripted I do not know. There had been heavy casualties in the tank battalions in Normandy. Replacements were urgently needed and some of these were trawled from the Navy. Telegraphists were already trained to read morse, which takes time to learn. My own brother was badly wounded in his tank in Normandy and received hospital treatment for 12 months. Then he was discharged from the army. He did a Douglas Bader and fought back his injuries to have a successful career in the Civil Service.

When I joined the Navy I met a friend who had transferred from the Army as a signaller. A lot of ships were being sunk and crews lost. Replacements were obtained from the Army.

One or two others out of the same class at Dundee are out here in the Eastern Fleet.

On April 29th 1945 I was in another town. It was Durban. We had left Simonstown after our refit and sailed round to Durban. Simonstown was nicknamed Snooky. Durban was a nice place, there were plenty of canteens and ice cream and fresh milk. I had a ride in a Zulu rickshaw. He was 6 feet tall and in national dress. It was warmer again and I put my blanket away again at night time.

PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS – KEN WATERSON

We went back on watch-keeping. I had now served two years in the Navy, another year's service and I will get 1s/9d (9p) a day extra pay for good conduct, if I behave myself.

I had got blisters on my feet from roller skating. The food was good, plenty of eggs, milk and lager. The one drawback was the number of flies and mosquitoes and I had been bitten all over. The insects were supposed to be non-disease carrying. There were clubs in which one could stay the night for 9d (4p), with clean sheets which were changed every day. It made a change from being on board all the time, when funds permitted. Spirits were in abundance, peppermint, ginger aniseed, cherry and many other varieties of brandy. In two month's time I shall have done half my overseas service. I offered to get some more photographs of myself but did not get any requests anyway there would not have been time.

We were two days out at sea when the war in Europe ended. If we had still been back in Durban we would have all got drunk. As it was, the "Main Brace" was spliced i.e. we all got an extra tot of rum. It is an old custom in the Navy. Apparently there is no official instruction written down in the signal book to give such an order. The Main Brace was on the old sailing ships and if it had actually been spliced the whole rigging would have collapsed.

As the war in Europe was over our ship was paid off when we got back to Colombo in Ceylon. Most of the crew came back to the UK having completed two years overseas service. I and a few other replacements stayed back on board the ship. We got a new ships' complement, mostly South Africans. They were shorter in stature than the British on the whole. The warm climate in South Africa must have an effect unless it was due to inbreeding.

The story goes that some of the old ship's crew joined the ship out east. Having been deserters from the Atlantic convoys they were sent to prison for a spell and then sent out east from where it was difficult to get home after desertion. It was said that they were marched to the quayside in handcuffs which were taken off before they walked up the gangway. One of them was a Quartermaster, called Jock, and was billeted in our mess. I became friendly with him and he confided in me. He had been sunk on an Atlantic convoy and had the good fortune to be picked up. After his survivor's leave he deserted, I suppose he was traumatized. He eventually stayed at home and even turned out for Celtic Football Club on a regular basis. His family had migrated to Glasgow from Southern Ireland. Eventually he was caught, the next door neighbour reported him to the authorities and they came for him. She had a son on the ground staff of the RAF who had a cosy existence by comparison in the UK Midlands.

He chummed up with a replacement signalman in our mess. Paddy came from Belfast and was a staunch Orangeman. They became good friends and exchanged notes about their times in "cells". I do not know what Paddy had done but he vied with Jock to tell tall stories of harshness in the Naval prison. Sometimes he was going to insult and run down the Pope but Jock always checked him and Paddy backed off. Paddy had a fine ginger beard and had boxed with Rinty Monogan in the training gym in Belfast. He said he was one of his sparring partners.

PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS – KEN WATERSON

PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS – KEN WATERSON

THE STORY OF MY LIFE ON BOARD THE DESTROYER H.M.S RELENTLESS 1944/1945

By Kenneth Waterson. Ordinary Telegraphist

CHAPTER 5

I could now make tea, toast bread and make a duff. Sometimes the duff came out OK; sometimes it was like eating a piece of rock. We got a refund of 25s/- (1 Pound 25p) from the mess fund. We must have been economic because we did not feel as if we were starving. Doing the dobeying seemed to get easier and my shirts were looking whiter. The last sea trip had been rough, things got shook around. I found myself at times two feet away from where I thought I was. Usually the sea was calm.

The ship had to “work up” for four weeks when the new crew was installed. That is like learning to drive in car terms. All systems were put through their paces, all the crew were put through their paces and the ship was turned on the “proverbial sixpence”. The guns were fired at moving targets towed by other ships and dragged by aircraft. Torpedoes were fired at targets. Depth charges were dropped which fetched up shoals of dead fish. We had to stalk a submarine by Asdic. The submarine captain complimented us on our endeavours; he could not shake us off. This was all very interesting. I even had to go in the plotting room as bombardment operator. My job was to read fall of shot observed from an aircraft transmitted by Morse Code.

During this time a lot of time was spent on swimming. I had bought some new swimming trunks for 1s/- (5p), they were green and white stripes. The sea was rather dirty in the harbour at this time. I was going ashore once a week for a bottle of beer, the ration. We were the only ones in harbour at times. Sometimes I went swimming at 07.00 in the morning. I walked round the harbour wall to pass on the time, several times. We had tied up alongside the Woolwich, our depot ship for some job or other, perhaps a mini boiler clean. Also we were vaccinated against cholera and something else. What this was for was not known then. With hindsight perhaps it was for protection on future landings in former Japanese occupied territories. Also we were issued with quinine tablets daily now; these tasted awful but went down OK when chased by one’s tot of rum.

My colleagues were all coming back to the UK except one other Coder. We got a new Petty Officer Telegraphist, a Leading Telegraphist and two Telegraphists and a Coder. The Petty Officer came without his rank but got it back the next day. He came on board in Seaman’s square rig but wore Petty Officers fore and aft rig the next day. He must have lost his rank but got it back when he was sent to sea out east. A new signalling staff also came on board.

Our old Petty Officer Telegraphist had been promoted to Chief Petty officer when only 26 which was young for a Chief. When he was a Leading Telegraphist he was also the youngest one. Most of the time he was decent with us and even lent me his camp bed on some occasions. That was considered the height of luxury. On other occasions he could be mean. He came back from ashore

PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS – KEN WATERSON

in a foul mood once and sent for me to scrub out the W/T Office at midnight on one occasion. I had been asleep until then.

Service on a destroyer was more interesting than on board a larger ship. You were the one doing the job and it was down to you whereas on a bigger ship there was always someone standing over you watching what you were doing. For the past two months the destroyers on the East Indies Station had had a rough time. The destroyers were the R, V and W Classes, all newly built since 1942, utility built and austere, and all trimmings cut back. They took part in the capture of Rangoon, except for Relentless and Roebuck. The Japs had the cheek to fire back which was something they did not do when we probed the coast. Several of our ships were hit at Rangoon and a lot of people killed

. Our ship, it transpired, was the smartest ship in the flotilla. It was always clean and smartly painted. Every day something was being done and the seamen were really cheesed off over it. The old skipper must have got a credit from it He was transferred to the submarine service.

In South Africa we all got rid of our dhobey rash, athlete's foot and prickly heat in the cooler climate. Whilst on refit we had our portholes open on our mess deck. They were not normally opened in harbour at Trincomalee and never at sea. It was nice to have fresh air circulating the mess deck. I usually slept on the upper deck because it was cooler. It was normally hot and sweaty below decks. One's washing soon dried on the upper deck. Only the very fussy lads used a clothes iron when really dressing up for a special run ashore. We were getting lime juice issued free on the mess deck and on sale in the NAAFI mixed with carbonated soda, which was known as "Goffers". On June 14th 1945 we put to sea on Operation Balsam, the object of which was photographic reconnaissance of Southern Malaya and Sumatra, and air strikes at Modan and Bindjai. The Relentless, with other destroyers, acted as an anti-submarine screen to the aircraft carriers. The force consisted of

3 x Escort Aircraft Carriers

1 x Attacker Class – Stalker

11500 tons; built 1941/2; turbines; 17 knots

AA (Anti aircraft) guns 2 x 4"; plus numerous lighter AA guns

Aircraft 15

2 x Ruler Class - Ameer, Khedive

11420 tons; built 1942/3 in USA (America); turbines; 17 knots

AA (Anti aircraft) guns 2 x 4"; plus numerous lighter AA guns

Aircraft 24

1 x Heavy Cruiser County Class - Suffolk

9759/9850 tons; length 630'; width 68¼'; draught 16¼';

Horsepower 80,000; turbines; 31½ knots

Guns 8 x 8"

PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS – KEN WATERSON

AA (Anti aircraft) guns 8 x 4"; 4 x 2 pounders

Torpedoes 8 x 21"

Aircraft 41 x Light Cruiser, Improved DIDO Class

Royalist 5770 tons; length 512'; width 50½'; draught 14 ¾'

Horsepower 62,000; turbines; 33 knots

Guns 8 x 5.25" D.P. (Dual Purpose)

AA (Anti aircraft) guns 12 x 2 pounders

Torpedoes 6 x 21"

5 x R Class Destroyers - Rotherham (leader), Racehorse (half leader), Roebuck (half leader),

Redoubt, Relentless

1705 tons (Rotherham 1725 tons); length 358 ¾'; width 35 ¾';

draught 20½'

Horsepower 40,000; geared turbines; 36 knots

Guns 4 x 4.7"

AA (Anti aircraft) guns 4 x 2 pounder pom poms in quadruple mountings; 6 x 20mm Oerlikon (Roebuck 4 x 20mm Oerlikon in twin power mountings)

Torpedoes 8 x 21"

Depth charges 1 rail 4 throwers 70 charges with T.S.D.S.

(Rotherham 2 rails 4 throwers 70 charges)

Submarine Detector C.S.A. A/S A.S.D.I.C. (Ping Pong)

The planes off our carriers destroyed 19 Jap planes on the ground for the loss of only one of ours.

The signalling staff were on two watches for 10 days, the seaman gunners on two watches for 4 days when in dangerous waters East of 90 degrees East. Someone else had just sunk a Jap cruiser nearby.

On our return we tied up for a month and only went to sea twice to escort carriers on trials. Four days were spent tied up to the depot ship, HMS Woolwich, for a boiler clean.

My letters home during June and July 1945 wrote of swimming. The sea at first was less choppy than usual and the weather was cooler. Salt in the sea seemed to get everywhere. For starters, with a couple of mess mates, we swam half way to the pier on the shore and back again. That was ¼ mile there and ¼ mile back. The ship rode at anchor out in the roads ½ mile from shore. Then one day we went all the way and got onto the pier for a breather before turning back. Several of our stokers were already there. Unfortunately the Captain saw us there from his launch on his way to see the Commodore. He did not appreciate part of his crew ashore in swimming trunks without formal leave of absence from the ship. So he had the trip to the pier banned in future.

Next I went for a swim after being rum bosun for the day. I needed to because I was feeling drowsy from all the sips of rum I got. The next day there was a scare, it was rumoured that there was a

PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS – KEN WATERSON

shark in the harbour so no-one swam for a spell.

How the shark got in the harbour is a mystery. Trincomalee Harbour was surrounded by land for 90% of its perimeter, the entrance was very narrow just wide enough for ships to pass through. On top of that there was a boom to stop enemy surface ships sneaking in and a net to keep out hostile submarines. We felt quite safe in there from surprise attack. Also a whale got in and beached itself. They must have got in when the boom was opened to let one or two battleships coming in or going out.

After the shark incident had died down and we had been swimming again the wind blew up for a few days making the sea very choppy. All swimming was cancelled again. All this swimming had made me feel fit and I was swimming every day when allowed. The next problem was the jellyfish which stung one quite painfully.

Further information to home described the food we were getting. I had made Toad in the Hole but the animal heart in it was still raw after cooking. Tins of pears eaten one between two bought privately were a treat. The beer ration was increased to two bottles per week ashore. One day we got some pineapples which we baked in a pie. The raw pineapple fruit made one's mouth sore. We got some ice cooled jelly for sweet with some sort of cake made on the mess. Potatoes became scarce; we had to make do with dehydrated ones which had no body in them. We felt hungry. There was a small supply of greens supplemented by pumpkins now and then. Latest supper was salmon and fresh salad which was on a Sunday.

Much interest at home was shown in my account of Indian snake charmers. Apparently they play on their pipe as if to charm the snake but then produce a mongoose which then fights the snake. The mongoose bites the snake on the head but does not have any teeth so the snake lives to see another day. Then a collection is made for the snake charmer.

About this time the forces must have had a pay increase. We all received large amounts of back pay. They gave us Post Office Savings Account bank books and put our back pay in that. There was plenty of sport ashore for those who wanted to take part such as hockey, football and cricket but it was far too hot to partake. One sweated enough without any effort. It was good to watch the Indians playing hockey; they were mustard (excellent) at it.

I had found out how to get my towels white, just boil them and they came white. My new sleeping quarters turned out to be by X gun with my overcoat underneath for a mattress and my oilskin for a cover which came in handy if it rained. It was too hot down in the mess and stuffy. The air was foul. A dog was the ships' mascot but it was a bad tempered one and bit people. The sun did not burn me as much but one could not lie in it for too long. If one exposed oneself too much one still got burnt. The duty seamen on the upper deck still had to wear their white shirts, shorts and cap. In harbour awnings were put up to shield from the sun. I had black leaded the companionway (stairs) out of our mess.

No mail had been received by my family for a few weeks. We had been to sea and were re-

PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS – KEN WATERSON

provisioned and refueled at sea so had had a double spell at sea. Our rations were cut and we were hungry.

I had started making my own cigarettes on a machine from Navy issue shag tobacco. The jellyfish were still biting and bringing up large sores.

PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS – KEN WATERSON

THE END OF THE JAPANESE WAR, 1945

The end of the war came suddenly, 14/08/1945. I was on the middle watch and had read the last message, i.e. taken down the Morse signal which then required decoding. First the message had to be decoded from the current 24 hour code in force and then decoded from the underlying six-monthly code. Up to then signals came through nonstop and were repeated immediately and at a few hours later. If reception was bad, which was often during monsoon storms and electric storms, one had the chance to re-read the message. Usually the second transmission came during someone else's watch. In one's own watch one got someone else's second transmission. The messages were left for the two coders to decode who worked in shifts of forenoon and afternoon. If one was urgent in the night, one sent for P.O.T.S (petty officer telegraphist) to allocate a coder. At the start of the watch I read the first message, by reading I mean writing down a series of figures. Most transmissions from the Signal Station Trincomalee were machine transmitted as numbers. Once that first message had cleared, no other signals were sent. All that came through was the top priority grading - OU - which was repeated for the rest of the watch. I could not leave the WT (wireless telegraph) office in case the message whatever it was came through. No-one came by so I had to wait until I was relieved before I had the Petty Officer Telegraphist woken up to tell him of - OU - grading. I don't think he believed me; he told me to "B" off. I think he did go down to the WT (wireless telegraph) office on afterthought. The following forenoon he was in the office and said the Japanese had asked for surrender terms. After some deliberation we were told terms had been offered. I think in fact we offered them terms and they had to have a second A bomb dropped before they accepted.

That night Trincomalee had its celebrations. There were rocket (distress flares) displays, jumping jacks and concerts. The weather was cooler, the oppressive heat had subsided. VJ evening started just before sunset. Ships were dressed, every colour of flag was flown. There were lots of nationalities. The alphabet went down the USA (America) and USSR (Russia), the latter flew the hammer and sickle. All the flags were hauled down at sunset but were then immediately re-hoisted. The dark night showed up illuminated Vs made up of coloured light bulbs. Some of these were in many colours.

When the last shadows had gone, the ship next to us let loose with her siren. It was a horrible noise, worse than a air-raid siren. After an interval of about 15 minutes every ship in the harbour was blowing off a different note. The result was an awful din. In time various Vs could be distinguished on different sirens. Some put in a J after the V making VJ in Morse code; Rockets (distress flares) and Vary lights (bright light flares) were being fired freely by now all over the harbour. Green, red, yellow and white ones. These offset the regular starboard and port navigation lights, green and red.

PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS – KEN WATERSON

Green and red lights shooting up into the sky and then down into the sea. Rustic VJs on hooters and much cheering completed an unreal atmosphere. Blackout was abandoned.

By 09:00pm the fun increased in tempo. Many were drunk now, where they got spirits and beer from is a mystery. We had none. Early an attempt had been made to mount a concert but the hooters drowned out any attempt to sing. Shooting pretty lights into the air became tame after a while. Ships started firing rockets at each other. Then they all started firing at the aircraft lined up on the upper deck of the aircraft carrier. An urgent signal was sent round the harbour to stop firing rockets. Various petty officers went round their ships to put a stop to the practice. It says something for discipline that the rocket shooting stopped. How it started I know not as I thought all rockets were kept under lock and key.

Instead jumping jacks were fired from rocket launchers. These were fearsome projectiles. They came in various colours and shot from left to right, from front to rear. Shooting down between deck awnings they scattered all and sundry. They were powerful, much stronger than bonfire night jumping jacks. They possibly were Chinese ones but who got them and from where is not known. The awnings were burnt in various place and a fire arose on one of the gun covers.

This led to hoses being turned on to put out all the small fires that had started. Generously ships put out each other's fires by hose. After that the hoses were turned on the other ship's crews.

Everybody was wet through. Chaps coming back on board from shore leave were caught in this deluge.

After that things died down; various concert parties were got up impromptu. We were tied up alongside the Woolwich, the destroyer parent ship. We got up a singing party and wheeled our piano out onto the quarter deck so that others could see and hear us. The quarter deck was beautifully decorated with bunting. Out came our players in their costumes and started to sing. The stokers on the Woolwich did not seem to appreciate our singing, they turned a hose pipe on us. The drums were soaked as was the piano, the bunting all bedraggled. They did have the foresight to close the bulkhead that gave us access to their ship. Had we made contact, World War III would have broken out between us. By now a lot of people were drunk, where they got their booze from is not known we had none.

After all this excitement things quietened down, just Vary lights now and then. A "feel good factor" abounded. The only alcohol we had was from the splicing of the main brace (an extra tot of rum).

PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS – KEN WATERSON

THE IMMEDIATE AFTERMATH AFTER THE CESSATION OF HOSTILITIES 1945

On September 1st 1945 we sailed out of Trincomalee as we had done many times, the lower deck hands battened down below until the harbour had been cleared. Then we were allowed up top in the fresh air whilst the upper deck men not on watch went down below to get out of their lily white tropical uniforms. They had had to stand to and line the gunwales in time honoured ceremonial. That was the drill every time we entered or left harbour. It was the nearest thing to a Sunday morning parade. The Japanese capitulated on September 2nd 1945.

This trip we reached landfall on the Malaysian side of the Bay of Bengal. All the way across was a double line of ships riding the swell, approximately half a mile apart, half a mile astern of each other. A sitting target before the war had ended. We sailed straight through the middle of them all. We went to Penang where HMS Nelson had her 16" guns trained on the town. The Royal Marines had taken 3000 Japs to the mainland of Malaya. We went into the harbour on September 4th and stood by with mosquito nets and khaki dress. We draped the mosquito nets down in the mess deck but still slept on the upper deck as there was no danger of mosquitos, someone had said. It was pleasanter on the upper deck.

The town was starving and just a small eastern affair that had once been an important port. Some of the lads got ashore for a visit. Everybody wanted to go but numbers had to be restricted, leading hands and above only got to go.

The Japs we saw in Penang Harbour who were cruising around the harbour in a lighter (barge) were big beefy chaps. They were the General's bodyguard and they were waiting for him to come off HMS Nelson, where he was agreeing surrender terms locally. That General was a cruel man and had a lot to answer for. The inhabitants of Penang had had a grim time. Mind you the bar there which was called "Tokyo Bar" was hurriedly changed to "London Bar" when our lads got there. We left Penang and went on working up exercises to cover landings. A whaler was sent ashore in charge of a sub-lieutenant. Revolvers were issued to the five man crew by the officer. They had a practise with the revolvers ashore on some island. The gun the officer kept for himself would not work for some reason. Why this exercise was held is not known. The whole ship's company watched the proceedings with amusement. During the working up spell, the 1st Lieutenant deliberately missed out B gun during one reload instruction. The Gun Captain, a beefy and popular Leading Seaman Gunner, had the gun reloaded not wishing to be caught out without a shell up his "spout". When the 1st Lieutenant only ordered A, X and Y guns to fire, "Jock" was caught with "one up the spout". He had to report "B gun ready to fire sir". "Jimmy the One"(the 1st Lieutenant) gave him a dressing down over the "intercom"; which all could hear. The round was fired out to sea to

PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS – KEN WATERSON

clear the gun. Everybody was keyed up.

On September 9th 1945 we overtook an invasion fleet and stood by at "Action Stations" from 05:00 to 13:00. With others we covered the landings at Port Dixon and Port Swettenham. Marines were put ashore during a long a slow operation. There were no incidents, the Japanese surrendered without resistance.

From there we sailed behind HMS Nelson and the French battleship, the Richelieu, to Singapore. I think we must have filled up both of our oil tanks or else we could not have spent all that time at sea. Perhaps we also refueled at sea, an oily business. I forget.

Going to Singapore, we took on board a Japanese pilot who guided us through an approach channel. The big ships let us go in front. I thought to myself, they are using us a live mine sweeping shield. Therefore I hung over the bow and looked out for mines with others. We went at full speed, to impress the battle wagons behind us. I expected the Japanese pilot to lead us into a batch of mines but he did not.

We saw some of the first troop ships sailing out of Singapore laden with sick ex-prisoners of war. Some of the lads got ashore, the off duty watch. They saw Japanese soldiers, now prisoners of war, working on government buildings. The work they had to do was digging up turfs and relaying them a few yards away. Some had spades, others used their bare hands. The Indian guards slapped them every time they stopped working to the cheers of the onlooking Chinese population. Some of the Jap's fainted in the heat. Later I did get to see them digging at the side of the road. I found out after that it was a stinking storm drain that they were clearing out. The Jap's were small and stocky, although they were muscular they appeared to be stupid looking. There were two rings of Indian troops to keep the local inhabitants from attacking them. We were allowed to walk through their ranks however, per a note of September 12th 1945.

It was monsoon time and when it rained it rained. That was what the storm drains were made for. After two hours of torrential rain it needed a storm drain to take the flood waters away. The storms are violent and forked lightning lights up the sky vividly. The sea blows violently rough at this time and strong cool winds blow. If sleeping out on the upper deck one was driven down below wet through. No chance of swimming either in the rough seas. Also the seas around Malaysia were shark infested nor were there any shark nets to keep them out. Reading Morse was difficult during electric storms the signal went up in pitch and then off the speaker returning seconds later

PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS – KEN WATERSON

THE CHANGE OVER TO PEACETIME ROUTINE 1945

Fresh food supplies were coming through now, per note of September 21st 1945. For a spell all food had been dehydrated or tinned. Dehydrated potatoes, tinned cabbage, corned beef, rice of a kind but no tinned flour yet. With the fresh food coming through our messes were opened to the ex-prisoners of war. Australians came aboard for tea and showers. At first the "rich" food we gave them made them sick. After they got used to it they ate heartily. They were very thin and sunburnt. The worst sick ones were sent home first. The ones who were not desperately ill had to wait for transport back to their homes someone said that all they had had to eat was grass. We had changed from Trincomalee Radio station to Singapore. I had been allocated to go ashore with a transmitter to set up communications but I was not needed as bigger ships had put bigger and better equipment ashore. The organisation was pretty good. It must have all been well planned in advance. Radio traffic died down now that the war was over. During the war the signals came through twenty four hours per day. Mines were floating about the sea lanes and channels were swept through them: 4 cables(800 yards) width on either side marked by buoys with flags atop. This job was done by mine sweepers.

I wrote an airmail letter home dated September 26th 1945 describing Adu Atoll. On the return from Singapore we apparently went to Abu Atoll in the Maldiv Islands. I have no memory of this occurrence and can only surmise it was a recreational trip as we had been at sea for some considerable time. The Atoll must have been made into some kind of harbour built by S.E.A.C(South East Asia Command) engineers. Perhaps it was an auxiliary anchorage to harbour part of the massive armada of ships sent out east after the end of the war in the west. Talk about organisation, the Japs would have stood no chance had they not surrendered. The facilities at Adu Atoll were basic. One hut for wireless telegraphy, a tanker in the lagoon for fuelling and the engineers' masterpiece-a bridge connecting two of the islands. We were allowed to go swimming and went in a party in a L.S.T(Land Ship Tanks). Rig of the day was swimming trunks and shoes (sandals). A strange rig. There were no local inhabitants to see us so that is perhaps why we were allowed out without white uniform. When we got to our lagoon we kicked off our shoes and jumped in. It soon became apparent why we had been instructed to wear shoes, the coral was razor sharp and lacerated our feet. The day was hot but the lagoon was very cool. The Atoll consisted of several small islands in a circle full of tall straight trees. On the outside of the islands was a coral reef at sea level. There are gaps through which ships can pass. Inside the ring of islands is a small circle of coral below sea level. Each island had its own ring of coral almost on the beach and just below water. Some had navigable gaps. The whole

PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS – KEN WATERSON

group of islands was about 2 miles across and 4 square miles in area enclosing about 3 square miles of sea.

We were now getting more water in the taps, per another letter of September 26th 1945, that is for longer periods, the same period as the officers. It used to be for 1 hour during meal times. The water is made from sea water and is very oily. It is hard to get a lather. Peace time regulations are being brought back now we have to wear a hat and white shorts during the forenoon. We can wear casual clothing afternoon onwards as long as one is not on upper deck watch. The ship keeps getting coats of paint here and there. An announcement was made by the Captain; anyone who wished could come forward and avail themselves for selection for continuous service. That was to join the Navy as a regular as most people were H.O.'s- hostilities only. Not many people volunteered for a permanent life in the Navy.

The Bay of Bengal, hot and sweaty, did not offer much attraction. My duties consisted on reading Morse in four watches and scrubbing out every other day. Now the war was over there was no BUZZ, it was glamorous (GUNG HO) being on board a Fleet Destroyer. The ship was scrubbed out from end to end every day. This was supposed to keep disease down but bugs thrived off all the soap left in crevices. These bit me all over.

Now back in Trincomalee Harbour we got more fresh food from Ceylon and received a stack of mail. I got two pipes which made my mouth sore and I had not smoked one for some time. Whilst we were there we received orders to sail back to the U.K. Draft chits were prepared for men who had not served two full years in the Far East. They were to be put ashore at Colombo and their replacements taken on board. On 26th September 1945 a party was arranged in Trincomalee to say farewell to the Commodore (D), the commander of all the Far Eastern Fleet Destroyers. The party was for the officers only and was held in the Ward Room, the Officers' Mess. The crew had the job of scrubbing and painting the ship for his visit.

On October the 2nd 1945, we arrived in Colombo and dropped those staying out East and took on board those going West, back home. As I had only served 15 months out East I was put ashore.

All the Rotherham class destroyers were going home; they had been the mainstay of the Eastern Fleet in the build up after the disaster of 1942 in the Far East.

This document was created with Win2PDF available at <http://www.win2pdf.com>.
The unregistered version of Win2PDF is for evaluation or non-commercial use only.
This page will not be added after purchasing Win2PDF.