

News of the BISN company, its ships and staff, its history and *histoires*, of ships and sealing wax, nautical natters, maritime miscellanies and swinging of lanterns

FROM THE EDITOR...

As we all slowly get back to work after the sporting hiatus of the last few weeks in UK, we can start to look forward to the big BI reunion next month in Southampton. But before that, we have to anticipate the annual BI Engineers Association meeting in Glasgow on 20th September. Less than a week to go at the time of writing, you can get more information from [James Slater](mailto:james.slater@zen.co.uk) <james.slater@zen.co.uk>; or UK telephone 01706 351190 or mobile 07702 124840. The Southampton do looks as though it's going to be fun, with a big participants list, a goodly range of activities to drag your editor away from the liar dice table. We look forward to meeting you. Our editor is usually the shifty-looking character in the corner by the bar, waiting for some-one to offer him a drink - Cheers! Certainly seems to be a grand occasion to wave off Sue Spence as she takes a well-earned rest from reunion-planning. We look forward to the pictures from both of these events!

The BI Eastern Region, or BIER as they like to call themselves, will be meeting for a Christmas lunch at the

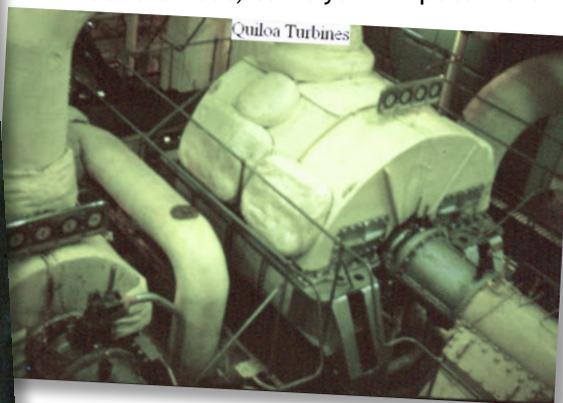
usual pub, [The Thatchers Arms](#) (CAMRA pub of the year for north Essex for the second year running), on 7th December. More details in our next issue, but you can confirm attendance with [John Prescott](#) now if you wish. A real mix of material for you to digest this issue, with a couple of old favourites, not to mention a bit of risqué illustration (full details upon request!). Many thanks to Paul Mann for his LSL memories. We also attach our first colour supplement! In order to give you the best possible view of our illustration of the *Nevasa*, we've put it on a landscape sheet as a separate file - make sure you've downloaded it as well. Thanks to all who are responding with other snippets and photos. We will be using them in due course, I assure you. And while we're on the subject, whoever sent us the picture of the *Dumra* on page 4, let us know. We've lost your details and we would very much like to acknowledge you in our next issue.

Happy reading!

FROM THE ENGINE ROOM....



We thank Brian Warburton for these photos of him standing guard over the controls on the *Quiloa*. You can almost hear the noise and feel the heat, can't you? Expect more from Brian in a future issue.



FROM THE SOUND BANKS....

Having sated ourselves on the fireworks from the Olympics and Paralympics, we were delighted to find this maritime riposte: <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L2WdU3Zkeig>>. But be warned - you may need ear-plugs!

To send in your views, notes, photos, brickbats or spare gold bars, please click on any "...callingBI" logo

FROM THE PHOTO ALBUM....



We thank Mike Ledger (who makes another appearance elsewhere in this issue) for this fine photograph of the *Nuddea* in drydock at Swan Hunters in 1960.

If you have any photos which could be of interest, we are always willing to receive them. High resolution scans are preferred, but we will accept slides, prints - such as this one - or negatives. All will be returned if required, although it may take Tracey some time to get round to it - Mike gave us this one at the Newcastle reunion two years ago! Oops - sorry Mike!

FROM THE REUNION SHOP....

As readers must surely be aware, the forthcoming reunion in Southampton will be the 12th to be organised in UK by Sue and John Spence and their last. To mark this milestone, and for those who might like to wear a small memento of the old company, houseflag lapel badges and woven patch badges will be available to purchase at at the Grand Harbour Hotel in Southampton. The



discreet enamel houseflag badges have a stylish stick pin (rather than a clip) making them suitable for the ladies as well as the menfolk. The woven patch has a design of BI's Britannia & Lion - at just over 2 inches it will be suitable for putting on caps, or polo shirts for example. As you can see from the illustrations, they are not reunion-specific, so can

be worn by anyone, even if you are not attending. Please see the display on the boards at the hotel or contact [John Prescott](#) for details.



FROM THE LSL FLEET....

Landing Ships Logistic were unusual vessels for the Merchant Navy to operate but British India Steam Navigation Company managed six for the Ministry of Transport manned by Hong Kong Chinese crew. These landing ships were roll-on roll-off with a tank deck capable of holding sixteen tanks. The ships rarely beached because, it was said, they held a passenger certificate for the 350 troops they carried and consequently the certificate would have to be renewed after each 'grounding' - that is each beach landing. I am unsure about this, my theory was that such an expensive vessel could not be risked. The ships were uncomfortable in bad weather for the draught was shallow; and the twin high revving engines sounded like jets when standing on the helicopter deck.

I joined the LSL *Sir Galahad* in Glasgow in January 1968 and suffered the usual dry-dock discomforts of noise and going ashore to the lavatory and the cold when the air-conditioning was tested with inches of snow covering the ship. Two weeks later we rolled and pitched our way to Southampton where 150 troops, including the



REME, embarked. Mechanical equipment and vehicles were loaded for Beef Island in the British Virgin Islands where the military were to disembark to enlarge the airstrip to take larger aircraft.

The idyllic Caribbean Beef Island was all but deserted. The only development of any sort was a wood shack from which a laidback American sold us soft drinks. And as he surveyed the empty, short, unsurfaced runway, he answered the telephone wryly: "This is Beef Island International Airport."

After taking soundings of the only likely 'beaching' spot, it was decided that the *Sir Galahad* would remain at anchor and the military equipment for creating a larger runway was ferried to the shore by a mexiflote (a largish floating pontoon propelled by two engines). This was marvellous because it meant that the discharge of cargo would take weeks rather than days. On exploring Beef Island it turned out to be an island of dreams with a rocky shore and a deserted horseshoe cove of fine white sand littered with conch shells. Inland giant cactus were covered in garish red flowers. Not weighed down by the bible and Shakespeare, we walked toward the narrow channel which separated Beef Island from the main island of Tortola. On Tortola the only sign of life was a West Indian leaning against a Land Rover. He nodded at the small bridge which linked the two islands and the plaque which told us the bridge had been opened by the Queen some years before. "Do you know her?" he asked. This wasn't sarcasm, his words reflecting the unspoiled nature of the people. Sure, he'd give us a lift into Road Town.

How much? Didn't matter, we could buy him a drink if we wanted. I reflected that it was this laid-back attractiveness of the man and of the unspoiled islands which the *Sir Galahad* might help destroy by the lengthening of the airstrip to take larger planes to bring in tourists.

Road Town, the capital, was sleepy and small. On a promontory stood a recently built hotel with stunning harbour views which indicated the coming tourist boom. But I enjoyed De Palladium better, a bright bar recommended by our driver friend. At six o'clock the Happy Hour was announced. American tourists were definitely not far off.

Returning to the ship a junior engineer swam out to meet the lifeboat which came to pick us up near the bridge link to Beef Island. He was immune to the barracuda after Happy Hour.

The *Sir Galahad* sailed from Beef Island to bunker at Barbados. The policeman who boarded chatted to me

and teasingly warned, 'Do not visit Harry's Niterly.' When asked, he wrote the bar's address on a slip of paper.

I still have the entrance tickets to Harry's and they show a photograph of a bare chested young woman seated in front of a



sign "Tourists Only". Although not a seamen's joint, it was certainly a place to be recommended. We sat on kitchen chairs, backs to the walls, in an unadorned upstairs room. We drank alarmingly large white rums scarcely coloured with Coke. These were served by young women who wore no clothes. The Master of Ceremonies stood in the centre of the room and talked. He was a natural raconteur. His theme was the naturalness of sex, I think, but my memory is clouded by time and white rum. But I can say for certain he made no reference to family values. As he talked, the women moved about the customers and writhed on our knees. The steel drums in the hall outside built to a climax. But what was most memorable was the audience. They were mostly women: American and past their prime; elderly in expensive clothes and their hair coloured-rinsed and starched. They batted not one eyelid and indeed stayed resolutely on until the end entering the spirit of the performance. They participated almost to the full.

We rested during the long sea voyage via the Cape of Good Hope to Singapore where the *Sir Galahad* was to be based. I suspect the bars there we frequented



FROM THE LSL FLEET (contd)....



are now gone: the friendly Cellar Bar with charming waitresses and where the music increased in volume and the lights dimmed as the day wore on. And, of course, the notorious Bugis Street where delicate Oriental transvestites and transsexuals, bewilderingly feminine, paraded and posed at tables where we ate satay and drank Tiger beer.

A trip to Bangkok was memorable - remember this was 1968! As our taxi stopped at traffic lights a hand pushed through the open window to give me a pasteboard card advertising blue movies in a massage parlour with a choice of thirty beautiful girls and an extra was vitamin C soap.

This was Conrad country and, although Conrad did not write of the joints and dives, he did write of the places that *Sir Galahad* visited in Malaya to take troops so they could wage war games in the jungle while we swam off beaches where turtles lay their eggs at night.

This was being at sea. The *Sir Galahad* was near paradise. Then a letter arrived telling me I was to be transferred to a cruise ship. BI, no doubt, looked on this appointment as a step up the ladder, but I saw it as punishment. Who would want to swap the no-trouble smiling Ghurkha troops we carried for passengers who complain? To swap a Borneo village built on stilts for noisy Casablanca? To swap those white sandy shores overhung with stately palms for Majorca? To post a postcard home with thousands of others from Leningrad or Lisbon instead of me taking the motorboat ashore, pushing through dense tropical jungle to seek out the camouflaged army tent which acted as the forces post office? Before I flew home a Ghurkha Major gave me his regiment's plaque. I was tempted to take it with me but left it to be fixed to a bulkhead in the officers' smoke room.

June, 1982 - some fourteen years later, I watched the television news. The LSL *Sir Galahad* being dive bombed in Bluff Cove in the Falkland Islands. As lifeboats and inflatables carrying survivors were dragged up a cold grey pebble beach, I lamented the waste of young life, the destruction of a ship where hung a plaque which I had left behind.

The *Dumra* in Muscat



FROM THE SUBSCRIPTIONS DEPT....

Our girl Tracey has bestirred herself enough to hand your despairing Editor her latest list of recent subscribers to "...calling BI". They include, in no particular order John Mains, Canada; Jim Meldrum, Australia; Robert Galloway, Australia; Chris Willis, Ireland; John Morton, Australia and Jim Lawson in Canada. Gentlemen, you are amongst friends.

Readers may recall that we asked recently if anybody knew of the whereabouts of Bob Hannah, as we were getting bounced emails from his address. Pip Parkin wrote into to say:

"I received an Email from Bob in Sept 2009, then roberthannah68@yahoo.com. He said "Am in Florida USA where I have lived for over 30 years". He must have got my number when I joined the BI group. He later reported a major computer problem and illness. Failed to trace him ever since.

He was a great 2EO on *Nuddea* when I was 5EO & Josh McCrindle was CEO. Before that Andy Mackie was 2EO. He taught me 'all I know', then subsequently shanghai-ed me to stand by *Quiloo* where he was CEO, in Scotts in Greenock. I owe him much. After *Quiloo*, I went as 4EO trooping on *Nevasa*.

Had I not married Robyn, from Sydney, I would have ignored the end of National Service and stayed at sea like you all.

If this email flushes out Bob, or any shipmates from the preceding litany, then hooray!
Pip Parkin

Later:

Amongst the unpumped bilges of my files, I have just unearthed the list of 19 addresses in Florida for "Robert Hannah" that I googled after the Email fiasco, but chickened out of calling- 'on spec'.

I have also noticed his second email, dated March 2010, came from rhanna1@cfl.rr.com. and ended ".....Have run out of steam Pip, so will close now and save some news for another time." Sadly, that may explain the loss of contact.

Incidentally, some of my best friends were Deckies! Nookie Noyle, 2/O on *Nuddea*, taught me why you guys alter course so often, just to travel in a straight line. Used that later for my yachting tickets.

Best regards and salaams

Many thanks, Pip, for getting in touch. We are sure this will bring back some good memories for some of our readers.



FROM THE COMPETITIONS DEPT....



We scoured our storage racks for old pictures again for our ever-popular “Where are we now?” competition and we’ve come up with this one, which should be fairly easy for you. Just where are Mike Ledger and Harold Holmes waiting for the Big Bang to occur? Send your answers in to [...calling BI](#) for a chance to claim one of the big surprise prizes from our girl Tracey. Have a look in those old shoe boxes under the spare bed for some other pictures that we can feature in this section., or indeed, just any shots that may be of interest to our readership at large. All contributions welcomed!



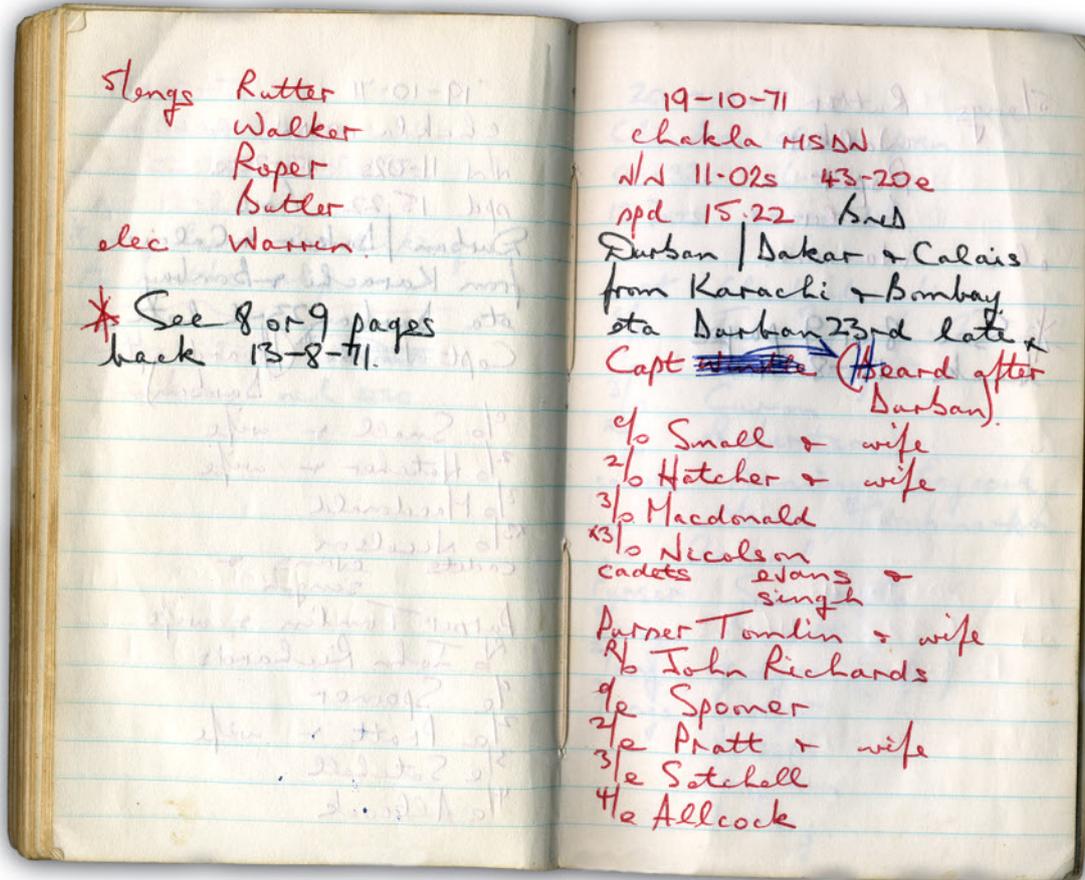
FROM THE AUCTION ROOM....

One of the more interesting items to come up for auction recently is this BI Commodore’s house flag. It eventually sold for £117. Whether that makes the one currently residing in the “...calling BI” editorial offices, which shows many marks of being older, worth any more is not known. It certainly gets a good outing at the various BI eastern region lunches from time to time.



FROM THE LITTLE BLACK BOOK....

We have pleasure in including yet another page from regular contributor David Hammond



FROM THE HEART...

In this day and age of instant communication, emails and texting, the following poem touches this editor's soul.

Elegy for the Personal Letter

I miss the rumpled corners of correspondence,
the ink blots and cross-outs that show
someone lives on the other end, a person
whose hands make errors, leave traces.
I miss fine stationary, its raised elegant
lettering prominent on creamy shades of ivory
or pearl grey. I even miss hasty notes
dashed off on notebook paper, edges
ragged as their scribbled messages--
can't write much now--thinking of you.
When letters come now, they are formatted
by some distant computer, addressed
to "Occupant" or "To the family living at"--
meagre greetings at best,
salutations made by committee.
Among the glossy catalogues
and one time only offers
the bills and invoices,

letters arrive so rarely now that I drop
all other mail to the floor when
an envelope arrives and the handwriting
is actual handwriting, the return address
somewhere I can locate on any map.
So seldom is it that letters come
That I stop everything else
to identify the scrawl that has come this far--
the twist and the whirl of the letters,
the loops of the numerals. I open
those envelopes first, forgetting
the claim of any other mail,
hoping for news I could not read
in any other way but this.

Allison Joseph, from *My Father's Kites*. (2010)
(Reprinted with thanks to Sam Ignarski's excellent 'Bow-Wave' e-zine)

