

HMS WAGER (1944)

THE SHIP'S COMPANY

In an ideal world this would be a full list of all the officers and ratings who served in HMS Wager from 1944-47. However, it is based on a guess-timate of the structure of the ship's company of this type of destroyer, in the final years of the Second World War and the first two years of peace that followed. The lack of detail owes much to this work being started over sixty years after the ship paid off, as well as to the inventor of the Internet and Email's failure to have done so thirty years earlier!

Ship's complement – 13 officers and 173 men = a total of 186.

Summary of the complement of HMS Wager by rank and rating* (with examples of common abbreviations in use) – some of this is very approximate:

Officers – 13 all told (*pretty accurate details*)

Commanding Officer¹ (CO) – Lt Cdr – 1

Lieutenant-Commander² (Lt Cdr - other than CO) – 1

Lieutenant³ (Lt) – 5

Sub-Lieutenant⁴ (Sub Lt) – 4

Midshipman⁵ (Mid) – 2

Ratings⁶ – 173 all told (*the composition is an informed guess*)

Chief Petty Officer⁷ (CPO) – 12

¹ The Commanding Officer is known as the Captain of the ship, regardless of his actual rank. He is referred to as 'Father' and as 'the Skipper' – but not in his hearing!

² Lieutenant-Commander was introduced as a formal rank in 1914. Known also as a 'Two and a Half' because of the rank marking of two medium stripes divided by a half stripe, the rank is the equivalent of Major in the Royal Marines and Army.

³ A Lieutenant wears two medium gold stripes and is the equivalent of a Captain in the Royal Marines. The rank was pronounced 'Loo-tenant' in the Royal Navy, as in the US Navy, distinct from the 'Left-tenant' in land forces. However, this pronunciation appears to have been a casualty of war, and for much of the last sixty years the pronunciation of Lieutenant has been that used by the Royal Marines and Army.

⁴ A Sub-Lieutenant wears one medium gold stripe. Sometimes called a 'Sub' or 'Mr' in the old Navy, young officers do not spend long in this rank. It equates to a Second Lieutenant in the Royal Marines.

⁵ A Midshipman wears a white patch on his jacket collar but no gold stripe; RNVR Midshipmen wore a light blue patch. The 'Mid', 'Middy' or 'Snotty' is an officer under training, not formally a 'commissioned officer' but entitled to a salute. In larger ships, he would mess (live) in a Gunroom, but in smaller ships he lived with the other ship's officers in the Wardroom.

⁶ Unlike the other services, including the Royal Marines, where there are officers, non-commissioned officers (NCO) and other ranks, in the Royal Navy it's officers and ratings, or officers, senior ratings (CPO and PO) and junior ratings (Leading Ratings and below). Together they form a ship's company and sometimes might be referred to as the 'officers and men'. The term naval rating is steeped in history: ships of the line in the time of Nelson were rated by the number of guns (HMS *Victory* was a first rate ship of the line – with 100 guns), and those who served in these ships became known as ratings.

⁷ A Chief Petty Officer was the senior rating of the Lower Deck (in the modern Navy, a Warrant Officer is the senior rating in most large ships). Known as 'Chief' he wears 'fore-and-aft' rig with three brass

Petty Officer⁸ (PO) – 29
Leading Rating⁹ (L or Ldg as prefix, eg LS, LWtr, LSBA) – 39
Able Rating¹⁰ (AB and all others not beginning with CPO, PO or L) – 82
Ordinary Rating¹¹ (Ord or OS, ACK among others) – 10
Juniors¹² (JS, JASA and others) – 0
NAAFI¹³ Canteen Assistant – 1

Summary of ship's complement of HMS *Wager* – ratings by department (a guess-timate)

Executive¹⁴ (Seaman + Operations) – 71 (5 CPO + 11 PO + 19 LR + 36 AB and below)
Communications¹⁵ – 16 (2 PO + 3 LR + 11 AB and below)
Engineering¹⁶ – 63 (7 CPO + 11 PO + 11 LR + 34 AB and below)
Supply and Secretariat¹⁷ – 22 (4 PO + 5 LR + 12 AB + 1 NAAFI)

buttons on the cuffs of his sleeve. His equivalent in the Royal Marines = Colour Sergeant; in the Army = Staff Sergeant.

⁸ A Petty Officer wears 'fore-and-aft' rig with two crossed hooks (anchors) on his left sleeve. Usually referred to as a 'PO', his equivalent in the Royal Marines and the Army is a Sergeant.

⁹ Leading Rating is a general term and sometimes a group of Leading Ratings might be referred to as Leading Hands or, colloquially, as Killicks (because of the single, plain anchor worn on the left sleeve of their 'square rig' – the traditional sailor's uniform). They are the equivalent of a Corporal in the Royal Marines and Army, but they live in a mess (messdeck) with other junior ratings and not in separate accommodation; one would be appointed 'Leading Hand of the Mess' and made responsible for the discipline of the messdeck, perhaps some thirty men. On advancement from the Able Rating to Leading Rating, their rating becomes Leading Seaman, Leading Stoker, Leading Writer, Leading Sick Berth Attendant, Leading Airman and so on. Often considered the most difficult job in the Navy, for he must lead his men but live and socialise with them, too.

¹⁰ An AB is an Able Seaman – originally an able-bodied seaman, a term from the days of sail when many a man might have lost a limb in action. He wears 'square rig' and no rank marking on the left sleeve but, like all ratings up to Petty Officer, he wears his branch badge on the right sleeve. The rating is the equivalent of Marine or a Private, Guardsman or Trooper in the Army.

¹¹ Ordinary Ratings do not appear separately in the Scheme of Complement and may substitute for Able Rating. An 'OD' (pronounced Oh Dee) was age 17½ to 18 unless he joined after that age span, when he was an Ordinary Rating for a short time, until he qualified Able Rating. Essentially, it is a probationary rating for sailors who have completed their training courses, but not been tested in a proper job.

¹² Juniors were any young ratings up to the age of 17½. Few would be at sea and, where possible, they messed in a Juniors Mess regardless of branch; most would serve in capital ships. Some Juniors joined HMS *Ganges* at the age of 15.

¹³ The NAAFI Canteen on board a ship is the retail shop. The Navy, Army and Air Force Institutes (NAAFI – pronounced 'naffy') was formed in 1921 and canteens were staffed by civilians at sea and ashore. The Canteen Manager or Canteen Assistant was known as the 'Can Man'. In wartime, NAAFI staff was taken on to the ship's books and fully came under the Naval Discipline Act. Sailors were sometimes called NAAFI 'ratings': they had No Aim, Ambition or Further Interest (I have to keep this clean!).

¹⁴ The Executive branch is the branch that includes Seaman Officers and all the fighting arms of the naval service. Executive officers command ships and, indeed, the command chain devolves to senior ratings of that branch, should all the executive officers be killed or unable to fight the ship.

¹⁵ The Communications branch includes Signals Officers and the ratings of two distinct sub-branches. Telegraphists (known as 'Sparks', but the PO Telegraphist was known as 'POTS') dealt with radio communications and Yeomen and Signalmen (known as 'bunting tossers') with flags and the rest.

¹⁶ Until the end of the Second World War, the Engineering branch referred only to the Engine Room department. There was no Electrical department or Weapons department until about 1947. The Engineer Officer wore a purple cloth between his gold stripes ('distinction cloth' was abolished in 1956). Ship's electrics were the province of the Torpedo department and the Gunnery department had its own Ordnance Artificers to maintain gunnery electrics and systems.

¹⁷ Junior Ratings of the Supply branch – the Supply and Secretariat branch (S&S), formerly the Accountant branch until October 1944 – wore 'fore-and-aft' rig, similar to that worn by senior ratings, although the

Medical¹⁸ – 1 (1 LR)

Summary of ratings in departments by sub-departments (a guess-timate).

Executive – 71

Coxswain¹⁹ – 1 ✪

Gunnery²⁰ – included the Ordnance Artificers? – (33 + 5) = 38

Torpedo²¹ – included the Electrical Artificers? – (18 + 4) = 22

Radar²² – 9

Diver²³ – 1

Communications – 16

Telegraphist – 11

Signalman – 5

Engineering²⁴ – 63

Engine Room Artificer²⁵ or Mechanician²⁶ – 8

buttons were black rather than brass, like junior rating artificers. This 'rig' was abolished in 1956 (though retained for artificers), since when they have worn the same 'square rig' as other junior ratings of the Royal Navy. In larger ships, the department was headed by an officer of the Supply branch, formerly known as the Paymaster (the Purser was a former name of this officer and it gave rise to the nickname 'Pusser', which is still in use) – see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Supply_officer.

¹⁸ The Medical department of any armed forces is governed by the rules of the Geneva Convention. A Medical Officer in the Royal Navy is called a Surgeon regardless of his medical qualification. He wears a scarlet distinction cloth between his gold stripes. In the Second World War, naval Sick Berth Attendants (SBAs) were not nurses – these were females of the Queen Alexandra Royal Naval Nursing Service and they served ashore in naval hospitals and, sometimes, at sea in Hospital Ships. SBAs ran the Sick Bay and assisted the Medical Officer when borne. However, they were trained in first aid and many lives were saved in action by members of this branch.

¹⁹ The Coxswain – the 'Swain' – carried out broadly the same function of a Master-at-Arms in larger ships. He was the senior rating on board the ship, responsible for the ship's routine and discipline. He was literally at the wheel of the ship during Actions Stations and for 'Special Sea Dutymen' and he would have been President of the Senior Ratings' Mess. His badge was a traditional ship's wheel, worn on both collars of his jacket. The Coxswain had a huge influence on the ship and how well he did his job contributed enormously to a ship being a 'Happy Ship' or not.

²⁰ The Gunnery department was responsible for gunnery, armaments, magazines and ceremonial drill. Often they would run the Routine Office which was where, literally, the ship's routine was organised and managed. The Gunnery School was at HMS *Excellent*, Whale Island in Portsmouth Harbour.

²¹ The Torpedo department was responsible for the ship's Torpedoes and systems, and the depth charges too. Because of this, the branch had assumed responsibility for ship's electrics, electrical distribution, telephones and domestic electrics. The Torpedo School was at HMS *Vernon* in Portsmouth. See http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~pbtyc/Branches/Torpedo_branch_1.html.

²² Radar (originally called RDF – Radar Direction Finding) was new in the Second World War and qualified radar specialists were scarce. Training was carried out at HMS *Dryad* in Southwick, near Portsmouth.

²³ There is a specialist Diving branch in the Royal Navy but not every ship would carry a Diver. Often, a member of the ship's company would volunteer for Ship's Diver and be trained to a basic level. The principal need was, of course, for inspection of the ship's bottom and propeller(s) when in the water.

²⁴ In the Engine Room there would be 1 x ERA1/2/3 and 1 Leading Stoker and 1 Stoker on watch. In each of the two boiler rooms there would be 1 x Stoker Petty Officer and 4 Stokers on watch.

Artisan²⁷ – 2
Stoker – 53

Supply and Secretariat²⁸ – 22

Writer²⁹ - 2
Supply Assistant (Stores) – 3
Supply Assistant (Victualling) – 3
Cook – 6
Officers' Cook – 3
Officers' Steward – 4
NAAFI Canteen – 1

Medical – 1

Sick Berth Assistant

The **Scheme of Complement** would probably comprise the officers and men needed to steam the ship in four watches. In wartime, at Action Stations, ships were often in two watches ('watch and watch about'), and relaxed to three watches, when possible, so that men could have 'all night in' occasionally. A four-watch system would be employed in peacetime steaming, where possible.

²⁵ Artificers underwent a four-year apprenticeship, with the first part of their training common, before they went on to specialist training – Engine Room, Electrical, Ordnance and Air - elsewhere. In 1940 the training was moved from Chatham to Torpoint in Cornwall, but the establishment was not commissioned as HMS *Fisgard* until 1946. Artificers were not seen in the Fleet until they were the equivalent of a Leading Hand, at the end of their shore training. Advancement to Chief Petty Officer was rapid. All Artificers wore 'fore and aft' rig and no branch badges were worn, though rating badges, of course, were. Artificers were considerably better paid than non-Artificers. There is an excellent recruiting film about the basic training of 'Tiffies' available on DVD: the film is *Tiffy* (1950).

²⁶ Mechanics were selected from among junior ratings of the relevant engineering specialisation and, after training, sent to sea at the Petty Officer level. At Chief Mechanician they equated to a Chief Artificer and were inter-changeable in terms of employment.

²⁷ Artisans comprised Shipwrights, Plumbers, Joiners, Blacksmiths, Painters and, even, Coopers but many of these trades were disappearing from the uniformed branches of the Royal Navy by the time of the Second World War, and became dockyard trades only. A few were still at sea in larger ships in the Second World War. HMS *Wager* will have had one Shipwright and, perhaps, one other Artisan.

²⁸ Junior Ratings of the Supply branch – the Supply and Secretariat branch (S&S), formerly the Accountant branch until October 1944 – wore 'fore and aft' rig, similar to that worn by senior ratings, although the buttons were black rather than brass. This 'rig' was abolished in 1956, since when they have worn the same 'square rig' as other junior ratings of the Royal Navy. In larger ships, the department was headed by an officer of the Supply branch, formerly known as the Paymaster – see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Supply_officer.

²⁹ The Writer branch of the Royal Navy was formed in 1861, around the time of the abolition of the officer rank of Clerk. He was responsible for pay and allowances, personnel records and ship's correspondence. Nickname: 'Scribes', his badge was a six-pointed star with a W in a centre circle. In the days of HMS *Wager*, Writers were better educated than many a rating, and the joke was that the 'pipe' of 'Hands to Dinner', at around 1200 daily, was followed by 'Writers to Lunch'!

The men's employment was governed by the **Watch and Station Bill**, which would indicate the watch of each man and his Action Station, as well as his role in other pre-determined situations. Some of the Ship's Company were known as 'day workers': the writers, supply assistants, sick berth attendant and the NAAFI Canteen Assistant, for example.

Men were allocated to two watches, the Port Watch or Starboard Watch, sub-divided into First of **Port** (or **Starboard**) Watch and Second of **Port** (or **Starboard**) Watch when in four watches. They had a **Station Card** coloured **red** (for **Port** Watch) or **green** (for **Starboard** Watch) and day workers and 'special duty men' had a **blue** card. These cards were important and were deposited at the gangway on proceeding off the ship, whether to go ashore or on duty to another ship in an anchorage, so as to make possible an easy check on who was on board and who was not. The Station Card of a man under punishment was withdrawn and held by the Coxswain; no Station Card, no leaving the ship!

So, for example, Able Seaman May might be in Second of **Starboard** Watch with an Action Station of the Port Torpedo Tubes.

In the Royal Navy, watches are kept as follows, and I have added an example of how the different watches of men would keep those watches on duty (when in four watches):

0800-1200 – Forenoon watch (First of **Port** Watch)
1200-1600 – Afternoon watch (First of **Starboard** Watch)
1600-1800 – First Dog watch (Second of **Port** Watch)
1800-2000 – Last Dog watch (Second of **Starboard** Watch)
2000-0000 – First watch (First of **Port** Watch)
0000-0400 – Middle watch (First of **Starboard** Watch)
0400-0800 – Morning watch (Second of **Port** Watch)

and the cycle continued

0800-1200 – Forenoon watch (Second of **Starboard** Watch)
1200-1600 – Afternoon watch (First of **Port** Watch)

There was a separate Watch and Station Bill for a three-watch system where the watches were called Red, White and Blue.

More about the 'ship's routine' and life at sea appears in the article on the ship's organisation. I have added this information here, though, so as to help make some sense of the numbers of men in the ship. Warships were very manpower intensive in the 1940s.

HMS WAGER – THE SHIP’S COMPANY

THE NAMES OF THE OFFICERS AND MEN

Each line represents one officer or man in the ship’s complement – guesswork, at this stage, of course, except for the Wardroom. There may have been more than 186 on board but, without evidence to the contrary, the presumption is that the ship’s company mirrored exactly the Scheme of Complement.

Nomenclature. The jobs that are done by officers and men, and many of the routines and tasks undertaken, of course have proper names and are covered by the multitude of naval service regulations, orders and instructions. But many of these proper names have other names, naval slang, as does much of the food – the ‘scran’. Many of the men’s surnames have nicknames, too, and even some of the ship’s names are given other names by ‘Jolly Jack’. Some sailors may not know a mate’s first name, just knowing that he is ‘Dodger Long’, and others may only know one of the cooks as ‘Scouse’ without ever knowing he even had a surname! Some of the Royal Navy’s language is part of the everyday English these days.

Some nicknames from 1944/45 - to inspire, perhaps, recalling sailors in HMS Wager

| | | |
|-----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Fanny Adams | Tom King | Jack Shepherd |
| Daisy Adams | Dodger Long | Smudge Smith |
| Dinger Bell | Shorty Long | Spike Sullivan |
| Wiggie Bennett | Pincher Martin | Buck Taylor |
| General Booth | Edna May | Hookey Walker |
| Nobby Clark (e) | Piggy May | Soapy Watson |
| Jumper Collins | Dusty Miller | Spider Webb |
| Happy Day | Pony Moore | Blanco White |
| Florrie Ford | Spud Murphy | Chalky White |
| Stormy Gale | Nosey Parker | Knocker White |
| Dolly Gray | Whacker Payne | Tug Wilson |
| Jimmy Green | Soapy Pears | Slinger Wood |
| Tosh Harding | Jessie Read | Shiner Wright |
| Taff Jones | Buck Ryan | Brigham Young |

Officers’ jobs. These officers’ names have been taken from 1944 and 1945 editions of *The Navy List*. At this stage, the jobs done by each of the officers listed below, other than the Captain, First Lieutenant, Engineer Officer and the Gunner (T), are not known. The seaman officer Lieutenants and Sub-Lieutenants in possession of a Bridge Watchkeeping Certificate would keep watches, as Officer of the Watch (OOW) on the Bridge. Each officer would also be a ‘Divisional Officer’, responsible for the professional delivery, development, training and welfare of the sailors in his ‘Division’. So, listed below are the principal jobs for officers in a destroyer that need to be allocated to a known name (some roles, those not highlighted, most likely are additional to the officer’s main job). The roles are based on personal knowledge and may not be absolutely correct. They are:

Navigating Officer
Gunnery Officer (‘Guns’) and, probably, an Assistant Gunnery Officer

Signals Officer – this job was often given to the Navigating Officer
Fo'c's'le (FX) and Cable Officer
Quarterdeck (AX) Officer
Top Part of Ship Officer
Mate of the Upper Deck
Senior Watchkeeping Officer
Correspondence Officer ('Corro')
Diving Officer
Blind Pilotage Officer
Special Sea Dutymen Officer of the Watch
Boarding Officer
Boats Officer
Junior Officers' Training Officer
Mail Officer
Victualling Officer
Stores Officer
Intelligence Officer
Cryptographic Officer
Security Officer
Confidential Books Officer ('CBO')
Keys Officer
Wardroom Mess Treasurer
Transport Officer
Sailing Officer
Sports Officer
Entertainment Officer
Education Officer

□□□

Lieutenant-Commander Roland C **Watkin**³⁰ RN – Commanding Officer

Lieutenant Richard J **Trowbridge**³¹ RN – First Lieutenant (3 Feb 44 >)

Lieutenant F M **Lewes** RN – (Mar - Sep 44)

Lieutenant J R **Lane** RN – (14 Mar 44>)

Temporary Lieutenant J R **Kent** RNVR – (14 Mar 44>)

Lieutenant-Commander (E) T H **Butlin**³² RN – Engineer Officer (Aug 43 -

³⁰ Formerly of the RNR/RNVR, he transferred to the RN during the war. 'Basher' Watkin retired as a Captain in around 1967/68. His last appointment was as Commodore Superintendent Contract Built Ships (CSCBS). He was a Young Brother of Trinity House and lived in Jurby, in the north of the Isle of Man, in retirement and is thought to have died in the 1990s, in the island, when age over 80. See also the author's note at the end of this article.

³¹ 'Tom' Trowbridge joined the Royal Navy as a Boy Seaman age 15 and retired as a Rear-Admiral in 1975. He later commanded the C Class destroyer HMS *Carysfort*, the Fishery Protection Squadron (known as 'Captain Fish') and the guided missile destroyer HMS *Hampshire* from 1967-69. His last appointment was a Flag Officer Royal Yachts (FORY), although he came out of retirement to be appointed as Governor-General of Western Australia from 1980-83. Rear-Admiral Sir Richard Trowbridge KCVO died on 4 May 2003, age 83. The Captain and officers traditionally refer to the First Lieutenant (also known as the Executive Officer) as 'Number One' but the lower deck call him 'The Jimmy' or 'Jimmy the One'. The First Lieutenant is head of the Executive (Operations or Seamen) department and responsible for the ship's operations, the appearance of the ship and for all 'whole ship' routines and discipline; he is also President of the Wardroom Mess. In smaller ships, he is also head of the supply department, although he may have delegated some of these duties, and also he elects either to be one of the bridge watchkeeping officers or takes a standing watch, typically the Morning Watch. See also the author's note at the end of this article.

Feb 45)

Temporary Surgeon Lieutenant G R **Gayman**³³ RCNVR – Medical Officer (27 Mar 44 - Sep 45)

Temporary Sub-Lieutenant Christopher H ('Kit') **Stewart-Lockhart**³⁴ RNVR – (Jan 44>)

Temporary Sub-Lieutenant M J **Phillips** RNVR – (20 Mar 44>)

Acting Commissioned Gunner (T) H A **Mitchell**³⁵ DSC RN – Torpedo Gunnery Officer ("Gunner T") (22 Dec 43>)

Temporary Midshipman C **Murdoch** RNVR - under training (1 Apr 44>)

Temporary Midshipman R F **Wiles** RNVR - under training (1 Apr 44>)

Temporary Sub-Lieutenant A J M **Jones** RNZNVR – (23 Aug 44>)

Temporary Lieutenant J **Clark** RN – (vice who? 19 Feb 45>)

Lieutenant (E) R G **Bastow** RN – (vice Lt Cdr Butlin 24 Feb 45>)

Temporary Sub-Lieutenant R D **Lee** RNVR – *vice who?* (22 Mar 45>)

DSC – Distinguished Service Cross

RCNVR – Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve

RNVR – Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve (called the 'Wavy Navy' because of the wavy gold stripes worn, rather than the straight stripes of the Royal Navy)

RNZNVR – Royal New Zealand Naval Volunteer Reserve

Some of the rating abbreviations may be wrong but I have guessed where I do not know what would appear on the Certificate of Service.

Abbreviations for sub-specialisations, rather than ratings, are at the bottom of this list.

Names in red: the names are right but I have guessed their rating – advice needed.

Yet to add footnotes to names to indicate those identified in photos.

One Chief Petty Officer (or Petty Officer, if there is no CPO) in each department would be the 'Regulating Chief' and he would take on the role of department co-ordinator, dealing with minor discipline but without formal powers of punishment. In the case of the Engineering department, this definitely would be the Chief Stoker Petty Officer.

Chief Petty Officer Coxswain (CPO COXN)

Chief Petty Officer Gunner's Mate (CPOGM)

³² Placed on the Retired List, as Lt Cdr (E), 5 April 1953. The Captain traditionally refers to the Engineer Officer as 'Chief' (from Chief Engineer). The Engineer Officer would also be the Damage Control Officer and Shipwright Officer.

³³ Surg Lt Gayman (1915-2002), a Canadian doctor, was commissioned into the RCN in 1941 and spent 1942-45 loaned to the Royal Navy. See http://www.unithistories.com/officers/RCNVR_officers.html.

³⁴ Kit Stewart-Lockhart later became Chairman of BAT; he died in May 2007. Father of Clive Stewart-Lockhart.

³⁵ The 'Gunner (T)' may have been the oldest officer in the Wardroom. He was commissioned from the ranks, first as a 'thin ring' Warrant Officer. In HMS *Wager*, as an Acting Commissioned Gunner, he would wear one stripe, the same as a Sub-Lieutenant. DSC [details for his gallantry award yet to be found in the *London Gazette*].

Chief Petty Officer Armourer (CPOA)

Petty Officer Gunnery Instructor (POGI) **"Tubby" Aldridge**³⁶

Petty Officer Gunner's Mate (POGM) **"Paddy" Welch**³⁷

Petty Officer Gun Layer (POGL) **Barton**³⁸

Petty Officer Torpedo Gunner's Mate (POTGM)

Petty Officer Torpedo Coxswain (POTC)

Leading Seaman (GL)

Leading Seaman (GL)

Leading Seaman (GL)

Leading Seaman (GL)

Leading Seaman (GQ) **Monroe**³⁹

Leading Seaman (GQ) **Sugarman**⁴⁰

Leading Seaman (GQ)

Leading Seaman (GC)

Leading Seaman (GC)

Leading Torpedoman

Leading Torpedoman

Leading Torpedoman

Leading Torpedoman

Leading Torpedoman

Leading Seaman (Radar)

Leading Seaman (Radar)

Leading Seaman (Radar)

Leading Seaman (Diver)

Able Seaman (GL) **Geoff Cave**⁴¹ (a Geordie)

Able Seaman (GL) **Ted Godfrey**⁴²

Able Seaman (GL) **Graham**⁴³

Able Seaman (GL) **Daniels**⁴⁴

Able Seaman (GL) **Lloyd**⁴⁵

Able Seaman (GL)

Able Seaman (GL)

Able Seaman (GL)

Able Seaman (GQ) **John C Dare**⁴⁶

Able Seaman (GQ) **Ted Inwood**⁴⁷

Able Seaman (GQ) **Tommy Prime**⁴⁸

³⁶ See photograph – dressed up for the Crossing the Line ceremony

³⁷ See photograph (details of relevant photographs will be added in due course)

³⁸ See photograph

³⁹ See photograph

⁴⁰ See photograph

⁴¹ See photograph

⁴² See photograph

⁴³ See photograph

⁴⁴ See photograph

⁴⁵ See photograph

⁴⁶ See photograph

⁴⁷ See photograph

Able Seaman (GQ)
Able Seaman (GQ) "Jock" Scullion⁴⁹
Able Seaman (GQ)
Able Seaman (GQ)
Able Seaman (GC) "Stripey" Fellowes⁵⁰
Able Seaman (GC)
Able Seaman (GC)
Able Seaman (LTO) Walter ("Stripey") May P/JX 152459 (Jun 44 – May 47)⁵¹
Able Seaman (LTO)
Able Seaman (LTO)
Able Seaman (LTO)
Able Seaman (ST) David Hilary Savin P/JX 357454 (Feb 44 – Feb 46)⁵²
Able Seaman (ST) Robert (Bob) Cadman⁵³
Able Seaman (ST) Wolstenholme⁵⁴
Able Seaman (ST) Eric Benson Jowett⁵⁵
Able Seaman (ST) Peter Sims⁵⁶
Able Seaman (ST)
Able Seaman (Radar) Leonard (Len) Ackroyd⁵⁷
Able Seaman (Radar) Bryan Patrick Morgan⁵⁸
Able Seaman (Radar) Simpson⁵⁹
Able Seaman (Radar) Smith⁶⁰ (drowned off Ceylon in 1944/45)
Able Seaman (Radar)
Able Seaman (Radar)

Ordnance Artificer First Class (OA1)
Ordnance Artificer Second Class (OA2)
Ordnance Artificer Second Class (OA2)
Ordnance Artificer Third Class (OA3)
Ordnance Artificer Fourth Class (OA4) Raper⁶¹ (from Aberdeen)

Electrical Artificer First Class (EA1)

⁴⁸ See photograph

⁴⁹ See photograph

⁵⁰ See photograph – Cock of the Fleet trophy

⁵¹ See photograph. Father of Lester May (b.1951) who served Royal Navy 1967-89, joining as a Junior Assistant Writer Second Class and leaving as a Lieutenant-Commander (S). A contributor to this website.

⁵² See photograph. Father of Vince Savin whose idea this website is.

⁵³ See photograph. Now age 82. Father of Robert Cadman (junior).

⁵⁴ See photograph

⁵⁵ Father of June Jowett-Durkin, he was in the torpedo department and died in 1994, age 69

⁵⁶ Reported by a friend called Moore, he resides in a nursing home in Adelaide, South Australia. He was an 'electrician' but more information needed. He emigrated to Australia after 12 years in the RN.

⁵⁷ See photograph. Now age 82. Uncle of Barbara Huntington.

⁵⁸ See photograph

⁵⁹ See photograph

⁶⁰ See photograph

⁶¹ See photograph

Electrical Artificer Second Class (EA2)
Electrical Artificer Third Class (EA3)
Electrical Artificer Fourth Class (EA4)

Petty Officer Telegraphist (POTS)
Leading Telegraphist
Leading Telegraphist
Telegraphist
Telegraphist
Telegraphist
Telegraphist
Telegraphist
Telegraphist
Telegraphist
Telegraphist

Yeoman
Leading Signalman
Signalman Ted **Longshaw**⁶²
Signalman 'Jigger' **Blackburn**, from Nottingham; he played the piano
Signalman [name unknown] a gas fitter from Oldham

Chief Engine Room Artificer (CERA) or Chief Mechanician (CMECH)⁶³
Engine Room Artificer First Class (ERA1) - or ERA2/3 or Mech equivalent
Engine Room Artificer First Class (ERA1) - or ERA2/3 or Mech equivalent
Engine Room Artificer First Class (ERA1) - or ERA2/3 or Mech equivalent
Engine Room Artificer First Class (ERA1) - or ERA2/3 or Mech equivalent
Shipwright Artificer First Class (SHPT1)
Chief Stoker Petty Officer⁶⁴ (CSPO)
Stoker Petty Officer (SPO) **Slack**⁶⁵
Stoker Petty Officer (SPO)
Engine Room Artificer Fourth Class (ERA4)
Engine Room Artificer Fourth Class (ERA4)
Joiner Fourth Class (JNR4)

⁶² See photograph. Advanced to Leading Signalman while on board. Later set up his own business and elected Master of the Launderers' Company in the City of London 1989-90. Now age 82 (born c. Mar 26).

⁶³ The Chief ERA ('Chief Tiff') - or the Chief Mechanician ('Chief Mech') - is a highly paid artificer who would act as the Deputy Engineer Officer.

⁶⁴ The Chief Stoker Petty Officer would be the Engineering department's 'Regulating Chief' and departmental co-ordinator. Keeping no watches down below, his role is purely administrative and he has a large number of people to look after, some sixty people in one department under just one commissioned officer - that's a tall order. He is known as the 'Chief Stoker'.

⁶⁵ See photograph of the football team

Engine Room Artificer Fifth Class (ERA5)

Leading Stoker

Stoker 1st Class **Bryan Morgan**⁶⁶

Stoker 1st Class **Joseph North**⁶⁷

Stoker 1st Class

Stoker 2nd Class

⁶⁶ Grandfather of Vanessa Brooks he was 16 when he joined the ship, having lied about his age. Rating unknown. He died in 2007 (tbc).

⁶⁷ A relative, surname Suter, reported his death on 25 Dec 07. Nothing known about his rating.

Wireman? This seems to be an early description for the new Electrician in the Electrical Branch, which would in time supersede the duties of the Torpedo Branch and, indeed, see the abolition of that branch.

Petty Officer Writer
Petty Officer Supply Assistant⁶⁸ (S)
Petty Officer Cook (S)
Petty Officer Steward⁶⁹
Leading Supply Assistant (V)
Leading Cook (O) John Stanley ("Knobby") **Knowles**⁷⁰ (28 Mar 44 – 1 May 46)
Leading Cook (S)
Leading Cook (S)
Leading Steward
Writer
Supply Assistant (S)
Supply Assistant (S)
Supply Assistant (V)
Supply Assistant (V)
Cook (O)
Cook (O)
Cook (S)
Cook (S)
Cook (S)
Officer's Steward
Officer's Steward

Canteen Assistant

Leading Sick Berth Attendant **Bailey**⁷¹ (from the Midlands)

Abbreviations (abbreviations not listed here are those of the actual rating, e.g. AB or ERA; listed here are the abbreviations that indicate a sub-specialisation)

GL – Gun Layer

GM – Gunner's Mate

LTO – Leading Torpedo Operation (this, too, a qualification, not a rating)

O – Officers' Cook

O – Ordnance

⁶⁸ A Supply Assistant – later Stores Accountant and, since 2006, a Logistician (Supply Chain) – dealt with all stores that are not part of the Engineer Officer's domain such as fuel and spare gear. He is affectionately known as a 'Jack Dusty'.

⁶⁹ Officers' Stewards worked only in the Wardroom although they usually formed part of the ship's First Aid Team at Action Stations. The Senior Ratings' mess (or messes) would each have one sailor detailed as their 'messman'.

⁷⁰ See photographs. Died 1972. Father of Ray Knowles. "A CPO in the electrical department".

⁷¹ See photograph. SBAs were known as the 'Sick Bay Tiff' or the 'Poultice Walloper'.

P – Propulsion
S – Stores
S – Ship's Cook
ST – Seaman Torpedoman
V – Victualling

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Lt Cdr (X) (C) Ken Armitage RN
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Lt Cdr (E) (ME) Ian Pile RN
Lt Cdr (S) Ben Warlow RN

Author's note – *Wager* connections and some dits⁷² from a Pusser!

Throughout my adolescence and, subsequently in my naval career, I listened to sea stories told by my father. Often the same stories were told and I became something of an expert at correcting, where necessary, his stories when repeated!

My father – AB (LTO) Walter **May**, served in the Royal Navy from 1923 to 1936, leaving at the end of his 'twelve' at the age of thirty, rejoining within the year, and serving another ten years from 1937-47, leaving finally when age nearly 41 as a naval pensioner. He never progressed beyond Able Seaman – he never tried - and was four times deprived of good conduct badges for punishment. Not surprisingly, he was never awarded the Long Service and Good Conduct Medal⁷³ (LS & GC Medal).

He served in a battleship, an aircraft carrier, heavy cruisers and light cruisers, eight destroyers, a sloop and a mine destructor vessel converted from a Dirty British collier (it probably had 'a salt-caked smoke stack, too!')⁷⁴. He never served ashore, except for training courses, the odd few weeks here and there in the naval barracks 'between ships' and a short spell as a guide on board Nelson's flagship, HMS *Victory* – he hated it, went adrift on purpose to avoid duty, and was drafted to sea again. He hated the carrier, too, and went 'on the trot' (AWOL⁷⁵) when she was in Colombo, finally rejoining her after a passage in the Bibby Liner ss *Lancashire*, then converted to a troopship. He loved his time in destroyers, where he enjoyed

⁷² Dits – stories.

⁷³ LS & GC Medal – awarded to ratings after 15 years man's time of good conduct; a small one-time gratuity is also paid. The silver medal has a dark blue ribbon with white edges.

⁷⁴ See the first line of the final verse of *Cargoes*, by the sea poet, Poet Laureate John Masefield (1878-1967).

⁷⁵ AWOL: Absent without leave (or 'going on the run'), a serious offence - in wartime especially.

the independence afforded a 'three-badgeman'⁷⁶ in the torpedo department – and he loved his daily tot of rum⁷⁷! So, while typing this, I am treating myself to a tot of *Wood's Old Navy Rum* and raising a glass to 'Stripey' May (while listening to the Band of HM Royal Marines)!

His career had seen him in ships with the Mediterranean Fleet, the Home Fleet and the Atlantic Fleet, on the West Indies station (from Canada to South America), and with the Far East Fleet on the China Station, as well as mine warfare in Welsh wartime waters out of Swansea.

In the Mediterranean, serving as an OD in his first ship, the flagship HMS *Iron Duke*, while leaning against an upper deck stanchion, watching the 'Med' pass by, admiring the beauty of the sea, he heard a voice say "OK lad, I'll hold this stanchion up for you! You get on with your work!" A big man, with admiral's stripes on his sleeve, was leaning next to him on the stanchion! He became familiar, all too familiar I imagine, with Main Street, Gibraltar and with Strait Street, Valletta (known as 'The Gut' to Anglophone sailors).

⁷⁶ Good Conduct Badges (GCBs) were awarded for 'undetected crime'! Still awarded today, though now regularised to 4, 8 and 12 years' service over the age of 18, in the Royal Navy of the Second World War GCBs were awarded for 3, 8 and 13 years' man's time. They were deprived as a punishment, acting as a buffer to more serious punishment, and restored are a regulation further period of 'good conduct'. They are chevrons, similar to the stripes of a lance corporal, corporal and sergeant, and worn on the left sleeve of the uniforms of sailors up to the rating of Petty Officer, below the crossed hooks or the killick's anchor; they are awarded (deprived and restored, too) to CPOs but not worn on their uniform.

⁷⁷ At the 'pipe' of "Up Spirits", generally at lunch time, the famous tot of rum in the Royal Navy was issued free every day to ratings, over 20 years of age, who had elected for 'Grog' – G on the ship's ledger. Those under 20 were 'UA' – under age – and those who elected not to draw the tot were T – temperance – and were paid 3d (pre-decimal money – 240d (pennies) to the £ (pound)!) a day for the privilege; it wasn't even 3d every day, as the 'Grog money' tables for accounting on the ship's ledger ran: Day 1 – 3d, Day 2 – 6d, Day 3 – 8d, Day 4 – 11d and so on! Officers were allowed a tot only when 'Splice the Main Brace' was ordered – this was a celebratory extra tot for a special day, such as the birth of a royal prince or at the end of a Review of the Fleet by the Sovereign. A tot was one-eighth of a pint of Navy Rum – 95.5° proof; over 50% ABV) from a special barrel carried in each ship, emblazoned with the words "THE KING – GOD BLESS HIM". It was supposed to be issued to junior ratings as 'Two and One', that is two parts water to one part rum but, in smaller ships, it was at the discretion of the Commanding Officer whether he allowed 'neaters' – a neat tot, with optional water – to which senior ratings were generally entitled. The lore of the tot is legendary and best stories are from those who drew their tot; when this author was UA as a naval rating, he anticipated electing to be G in April 1971. The Admiralty abolished the daily issue of rum on 31 July 1970, declaring it unsuitable a tradition for the modern Royal Navy in the technological age. However, let me say that the tot provided a useful form of barter on board HM Ships, and a favour for an 'oppo' (a messmate or shipmate) might be worth 'half a tot' and that 'cost' might even go unsaid, and just indicated by use of the fingers. Try this little experiment, but only if you are age 20 or over and male: with a highball glass (similar to a tot glass which was a simple half-pint glass) on the table, hold one hand out in front of you, and leave your forefinger and little finger pointing out, with the other fingers and thumb curling into the palm; that hand signal means 'half a tot'. Now place your two fingers by the glass, small finger at the bottom, and it should indicate about half. Better still, buy some Pusser's Rum (see <http://www.pussers.com>) or Wood's Old Navy Rum (<http://www.woodsrum.co.uk>), a near equivalent, and fill the glass with one-third rum; that's 'neaters'. Have a sip and that's 'sippers' – a kind gesture to a messmate, perhaps in return for a small favour; (a bigger favour, it was 'gulpers'). Now fill the glass with twice as much water and that will approximate to the Royal Navy's daily issue of 'two and one' for ratings from 1740 until 1970. 'Sippers' might not seem much, but on a matelot's birthday, in addition to his own tot, it was not uncommon for him to be offered sippers from a numbers of messmates' tots, not just in his own messdeck ... I am sure you get the picture! Better still, try this experiment somewhere where you can replicate the movement of a ship in a force 8 gale! Please drink your tot sensibly! ☺

He had done rough weather trials in the destroyer HMS *Sturdy*, only leaving Portsmouth if it was bad weather, and to the order 'follow the *Furious*' – the early aircraft carrier – he was a quartermaster on the wheel of her escort destroyer HMS *Tyrian*.

From age 21, three years in the Flower class sloop HMS *Wistaria*⁷⁸ on the West Indies Station brought him six months alongside in Bermuda with a ship's boiler defect, and took him all the way to Manaus, 1000 miles up the River Amazon, as well as from Prince Edward Island to South America and the islands of the Caribbean. Time alongside in Florida during Prohibition⁷⁹ nearly saw the end of his service for the King. HMS *Wistaria* was small and unimpressive, and alongside her scuttles⁸⁰ were close to the jetty, such that you could have a conversation through the open scuttle. Able Seaman May was on duty as 'jetty sentry' for the afternoon watch and, interested in motorcycles, was chatting to a policeman on his Harley Davidson who has stopped by out of curiosity. At 'tot time' a glass was passed through the scuttle to Wally May by a shipmate, and the policeman wondered what it was; suffice to say, a near 100° proof spirit (served neat in small ships) was a big surprise to the policeman, used to eight or more years of prohibition, when my father offered him 'sippers'!

Later, in the same visit, Dad was ashore when he met some dubious characters. They were rum runners, gangsters running fast boats from the Bahama Islands to the USA, fast so as to avoid the US Coast Guard and customs. They wanted good, able-bodied, young seaman and a British tar was ideal. Dad told me he would have joined them were it not for his savings in the Dockyard bank; the Australian naval officer who was the Navigating Officer would not pay him his £100, as he was suspicious of Dad's motives! My tot of rum is finished, but so would I have been - as a human being - had Dad gone on the run for rum in the late 1920s!

In the early 1930s he was in Wei-Hai-Wei, the British fleet's summer port in China, with the heavy cruiser HMS *Coventry*, and a couple of destroyers were secured outboard. While leaning over the side, looking down enviously on the destroyermen and their comparatively slack routines, he heard a voice from a loudhailer, from HMS *Wild Swan*, advertise their need for two 'stayed hands'. He was in the Routine Office smartish and soon joined the old V & W class destroyer. Bliss – and neat tots!

⁷⁸ A sister-ship survives: HMS *President* (1918), on the Thames Embankment, near the Temple, was built as the Flower class sloop HMS *Saxifrage*. This numerous class were built between 1915-19 and were small: 1,200 tons, 262½ feet (80m) in length with 2 x 4-inch guns and a complement of 90 men. They were used for policing the Empire and for 'sending a gunboat' diplomacy. Sister ships included such improbable names as HM Ships *Bluebell*, *Candytuft*, *Coreopsis*, *Gaillardia*, *Gladiolus*, *Lily*, *Myosotis*, *Narcissus*, *Pelargonium*, *Snowdrop* and *Convolvulus*! I love the thought of Jolly Jack, returning from his run ashore in Pompey, trying to tell the policeman at the Dockyard gate that he is from HMS *Convolvulus*!

⁷⁹ Prohibition – US law prohibited the sale of alcohol in the USA between 1920 and 1933; it is still prohibited in ships of the US Navy. Prohibition gave rise to rum-running, Al Capone and gangsterism.

⁸⁰ Scuttles – the naval term for portholes.

More service followed in the Mediterranean in other cruisers. He volunteered for submarine service and, in early June 1939 began his training at the Submarine School, HMS *Dolphin*⁸¹ in Gosport. He soon decided against⁸² and reverted to 'General Service'. My father's war service was not especially eventful in terms of enemy action and generally routine, in HMS *Amazon*, HMS *Formidable*, HMS *Fairfax* between 1939 and 1944.

But, despite joining the Navy and seeing the world, he had never been to Australasia and the Antipodes. His last ship was to be the brand new destroyer HMS *Wager*. It was fitting that he should end his career in a modern ship of the type, having served in the 1920s and 1930s in four of the famous S and T class, two of the more famous (V and) W class, all from the Great War, and the prototype HMS *Amazon* (1926) out of Scapa Flow at the start of the Second World War. That's eight destroyers all told. And I thought I was doing quite well, in my career as a Pusser, to have had every other job at sea – about half my career in ships!

His story in HMS *Wager* is that of the ship, of course, and I have little to add here. I'd wager he enjoyed his time in her; he certainly liked his boss, Gunner (T) H A Mitchell, who described him as a 'Good LTO'. He did not much like Basher Watkin, the captain, though. His sea stories were not so much of the war, though, and I know little of the real detail of those six years of his life. He was happier telling tales of times in the 1920s and 1930s.

I do know that he told me that he had his photograph taken by the press in Australia, as the face of a typical British Tar, in 1945 and I must research relevant copies of *The Sydney Morning Herald* in the Newspaper Library at Colindale. I have no photographs of my father in uniform at all, and have always imagined him as the sailor on the packet of John Player cigarettes, so watch this space! Also, Dad told me that he played water polo and, while at anchor in company with HMS *Whelp*, the two ships had a water polo match. It is common to kick further down, under the water, an opponent, so as to keep him out of the game a while, and Dad told me that he had so dealt with the 'Greek Prince'!⁸³

There are two other links for me with the story of HMS *Wager*. After leaving the submarine base at HMS *Dolphin* in July 1969, Writer May joined the guided missile destroyer HMS *Hampshire*. How odd that the new Captain, Richard Clayton, had succeeded Captain Richard 'Tom' Trowbridge only a couple of months previously. What a pity I was unaware back then and did not serve with him; I never did meet him.

⁸¹ The Submarine School was in Fort Blockhouse, at the entrance to Portsmouth Harbour. Lester May's first proper job as a young Writer was in HMS *Dolphin* from 1968-69; following in father's footsteps!

⁸² My father's decision to leave submarine training was prompted by the loss of the submarine HMS *Thetis* in Liverpool Bay on 1 June 1939, with the loss of 99 men.

⁸³ The 'Greek Prince' was, of course, the First Lieutenant of HMS *Whelp*, now better known as HRH The Duke of Edinburgh. A water polo team has seven players, including one in goal.

Then, in mid-May 1981, during a break from hydrographic surveys south of the Monach Islands, in the Sea of the Hebrides, HMS *Hydra*⁸⁴ paid a routine visit to Douglas, Isle of Man. We had heard of Captain Watkin from the officers of the THV *Patricia*, the flagship of Trinity House⁸⁵, as Captain Watkin was a Younger Brother of Trinity House. The Captain of HMS *Hydra*, Commander Richard Campbell RN, the Navigating Officer and I, the Supply Officer, accepted an invitation to Sunday lunch from Captain and Mrs Watkin (a Manx woman) at their farmhouse near Jurby, in the north of the Isle of Man. He had good reason to be in touch with us, for in his last naval appointment, as Commodore Superintendent Contract Built Ships (CSCBS), he had accepted HMS *Hydra* in 1966, from Yarrow Shipbuilders in Scotstoun, on the River Clyde, on behalf of the Admiralty.

After drinks in their living room, we walked through to the dining room, and you might imagine my surprise when I walked past the ship's bell of HMS *Wager* (1944)⁸⁶. I still had made no connection with his name, but the name of HMS *Wager* was different. When I asked him what his connection with the ship was, he boomed across the dining table to my Captain, "Campbell! May's father was in my ship!" He did not seem to recall my father and, when I told my father of the meeting, he was unimpressed and not much interested, such was his dislike for 'Basher' Watkin. A pity. I met 'Basher' Watkin once more, when he came to an official reception held on board HMS *Hydra* when locked in to Gladstone Dock, Bootle, in June 1981.

Penultimately, not links but certainly empathy. I served in the Leander Class frigate, HMS *Jupiter*, which was not only similar in dimensions, though of rather larger displacement, but was also built on the Clyde and had the same name as a J class destroyer, a near-sister of the W class; the destroyer HMS *Jupiter* was lost in the Battle of the Java Sea in 1942. So I can relate to serving in a similar size of ship to those in HMS *Wager* and this is further helped by a visit I paid to HMS *Cavalier*⁸⁷, another near-sister, preserved in Chatham Historic Dockyard, on 14 November 2007, for the unveiling of the Destroyer Memorial by HRH The Duke of Edinburgh.

⁸⁴ I have written a history of HMS *Hydra*, covering the period of her service in the Royal Navy from 1966-86. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HMS_Hydra_%28A144%29.

⁸⁵ Trinity House is the authority responsible for lights and buoys in English and Welsh waters. The Trinity House Vessel *Patricia* was their flagship, and senior members of the authority embarked in her for inspections from time to time. The Northern Lighthouse Board is the name of the body with the same responsibilities in the waters around Scotland and the Isle of Man.

⁸⁶ A ship's bell is a prized possession. Bells of HM Ships are cast in bronze and boldly engraved with the name of the ship (no HMS) and date of build of the ship and the Government arrow. When in commission, upturned bells are used to christen babies of sailors on the ship's company and they may have the name of the baby inscribed inside the lip. When a ship pays off, the bell is stored in the dockyard trophy store. When ships are sold out of service, occasional auctions of ships' bells are held; preference in the sale goes to someone with a real connection to the ship.

⁸⁷ HMS *Cavalier* is the only destroyer preserved in the UK. She was built in 1944 at the same shipyard as HMS *Wager*, and launched five months later at John Brown of Clydebank, but with improved armaments, although similar dimensions. See http://www.chdt.org.uk/NetsiteCMS/pageid/659/hms_cavalier.html.

And lastly, in being appointed to my last ship, the Type 22 frigate HMS *Brave*, as Supply Officer, I joined her in the hands of the builder, Yarrow at Scotstoun on the River Clyde. She was known as Yard No. 1029, and I spent some six months of autumn, winter and early spring in a wet and cold Glasgow, standing by the ship, working in unloved shipyard offices and living in digs ashore. Very interesting and a great experience, for sure, but pretty miserable much of the time. The experience was recalled as I wrote the history of HMS *Wager*, noting that her first officers joined in the autumn and around Christmas 1943, and others joined in the early months of 1944. Similar weather, and not dissimilar conditions perhaps, and very similar procedures and duties, but no threat of enemy bombing raids in 1985/86 and no expectation of a rush job because there's a war on! It was a marvellous feeling moving on board our brand new ship for the first time, setting up home and my new place of work, and sailing for the first time, with the Red Ensign flying proud⁸⁸. Then comes the hard work, as the ship's trials begin and the ship undergoes a naval 'work up' to ready her for the Fleet. Thus I can happily empathise with those lucky men in 1944 doing much the same in Glasgow, I'd bet, for HMS *Wager*.

My father's connection with his last ship continued till his final year – he continued to like a bet on the horses! The last time I saw my father was in April 1982, about a fortnight before my ship, the ocean survey ship HMS *Hydra*, sailed south on 24 Apr 82 for the Falkland Islands in the role of a hospital ship. I still have his last letters and am pleased that he was aware of the ship's movements, both from my letters and the television news, though I regret never having been able to exchange sea stories after that war. My father died of cancer five days before HMS *Hydra* arrived in Portsmouth, exactly five months after departure. Gladly, my mother was able to meet the ship and I was able to attend the funeral in naval uniform, a final salute to my Old Man of the Sea. It was 'eight bells' for Able Seaman May.

My association with this HMS *Wager* project has been time-consuming but very interesting, worthwhile I hope, and a labour of love. I have learned a lot about my father's career and destroyer life and about the British Pacific Fleet and the war against Japan. I hope still to find a photograph of my father but the association with others who served in her, and their descendants who are interested in HMS *Wager* and her men, has in many ways been more rewarding than a single photograph. And I was thrilled when I was told that former AB Bob Cadman well remembers my father, "Stripey" May, a moniker I had not heard before! I am very grateful to Vince Savin, Chris Paterson, the webmaster, and the wider *Wager* family.

Forgive my indulgence with this part of my story; I hope it has been of some interest. For me, this is proof positive that naval history and family history

⁸⁸ The Red Ensign is similar in design to the Royal Navy's White Ensign, but it is the flag of the British Merchant Navy. It is flown in a new warship when she is in the hands of the builders. The White Ensign displaces the Red Ensign, in a formal commissioning ceremony, when the first Commanding Officer signs for the ship from CSCBS – see footnote 30 and, also, text above.

are no idle pursuits; this project is bringing much pleasure to me and, I hope, to many others.

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Lt Cdr Lester May RN

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17 May 2008 – updated 14 Jan 09

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