

PRESIDENT'S MUSINGS – FEBRUARY 2016

We extend New Years Greetings to you all, trusting that you will be both happy and well in 2016. Personally I look forward with confidence to the year ahead, knowing that I am supported by an excellent team and a loyal and faithful membership! ***Give yourselves a hearty slap on the back!!***

I enjoyed meeting our New National President, David Michael, whilst I was in Sydney last month. We had a very productive meeting and I commend the Member's Survey to you, and urge you to make your views known. We belong to the Naval Historical Society of Australia because we share a strong interest in Navy History in general, but specifically that of our RAN and kindred Navies, ie RN, RNZN, RCN and big brother the USN. Our society seeks to support our Navy in all its endeavours, and indeed it is a privilege to be part of this organisation which provides research and information to the public of the highest quality. *The NHS of A is our Society, and no matter where ever we live, we are all one organisation, and I am proud of this!*

Looking forward to catching up with you and your friends at our meeting at the MNC on February 22nd. Captain Martin Holmes is an excellent speaker, and you and your friends are in for an entertaining time. Not only will you share Martin's experiences of "The Troubles-Cyprus 1958" (Some Serious-Some Not!) but, you'll enjoy Rodney's supper as well. Check out the Flyer elsewhere in this 'Dog'.

Negotiations are in hand re our March Speaker, for ***Monday March 21st***, and we have secured a ***very*** interesting ***ANZAC DVD presentation*** for ***Monday April 18th***. ***Note the dates please! Because Easter Monday and Anzac Day fall on the 4th Monday of both March and April respectively we have had to change our meeting dates!***

Rex's Odyssey - Part 3. (London August 2015)

My first port of call in London was to spend a day at the newly refurbished Imperial War Museum. As you walk through the park towards the IWM you view two 15" Guns from the Battleships HMS Resolution (from 1916-1938), and HMS RAMILLES (from 1916-1941). In 1944 Ramilles' gun was fitted to the Monitor Roberts and was used to good effect on 'D' day, bombarding east of Sword beach and later around the Caen area.



As you enter the IWM building you are in an Atrium, which enables you the visitor to take in at a glance just what is being displayed at each level, plus view a Spitfire and Harrier in suspended flight, flying bomb etc. etc. ***Intrigued!!*** The old adage '*a picture is worth a thousand words*' certainly applies in

this case! The shot taken looking down was through courtesy of Wikipedia, and the other photo showing the Spitfire with the 'windows' behind is mine!

The WWI displays have been revamped for the centenary, and I have endeavoured to convey their excellence through my photos. As always artifacts from the conflicts dominate, but actual film and stills from the exhibits have been used to good effect. Over the years I have visited the IWM many times and always their WWI displays are the highlight of the visit.



In 1941 the Royal Italian Navy achieved success with manned torpedoes against shipping in Gibraltar, and also at Alexandria, where they severely damaged battleships HMS QUEEN ELIZABETH and HMS VALIANT. Named 'Pigs' by their crews because of handling difficulties, development began on these vessels in 1935, with the first batch being ordered in 1940. These

Submersible: SSB 'Maiale'(Pig) Manned Torpedoes had a crew of two. They wore protective rubber suits and bottled oxygen-fed breathing apparatus. The officer pilot, forward, steered the craft with the co-pilot in tandem. The Maiale could dive to 30m to penetrate harbour defences. The crew detached the warhead which was attached to warship's or merchant vessel's hull by means of a cable passed through magnetic clamps and slung through a suspension-ring on the warhead. These attacks were carried out by a 'SLC' 'Maiale' manned torpedo. The 'Maiale' photographed at the IWM is a later model.

The picture of the jolly boat from the SS Anglo Saxon London, has quite a tale to tell. On 21st August 1940 the German Armed Merchant raider Widder launched a surprise attack on SS Anglo Saxon, which was sailing alone, some 800 miles west of the Canary islands.

Widder's first salvo knocked out the poop deck and gun platform, finishing her off with a torpedo later. Seven crew members managed to escape in the ship's jolly boat, and set sail westward in the hope of reaching an island in the Caribbean or being rescued by a passing ship.

Daily rations were half a cup of water and half a biscuit, with an occasional issue of tinned mutton and condensed milk. By September 12th only Roy Widdicombe and Robert Tapscott had survived. Cloud bursts on September 12th and the 20th respectively provided water, but by the 24th all the water and ships biscuits had gone. Tapscott and Widdicombe had now been in the jolly boat for nearly 5 weeks and their terrible odyssey was to last for an almost equal length of time. Over the next weeks the jolly boat sailed and drifted westwards. Both sailors stayed alive through a mixture of luck and improvisation. They subsisted on seaweed, with the occasional shower providing rain water and once a flying fish landed in the boat. Two ships passed by



without seeing them, and desperate, Widdicombe broke his front teeth trying to eat his shoes. Both men fought to preserve their sanity. By the 68th day Widdicombe was slipping into unconsciousness, but was heartened to spot a lone sea gull. Next day an island was sighted and the two men guided the boat towards land.

On Wednesday October 30th the jolly boat came ashore on the island of Eleuthera in the Bahamas. It was 70 days and 2500 miles since the men had abandoned the Anglo Saxon. Discovered on the beach by a farmer they were placed in a hospital in Nassau. Widdicombe was first to recover and in 1941 sailed from New York to Liverpool but tragically one day out of Liverpool his ship was torpedoed with the loss of all hands. Tapscott recovered more slowly. He went to Canada and enlisted in the Canadian Army in 1941, but went back to sea in March 1943. He continued to serve at sea until his early death aged 42 in 1963.

My source for these stories is the [IWM Website](#) and I urge you check out the fuller versions.

Yours Aye!!

Rex Williams

(More photos from the Imperial War Museum can be seen on our webpages <http://nhsavic.navyvic.net>)