

CHAPTER IXH.M.S. 'FURIOUS'

Having recently become engaged, I was not entirely pleased when my application for naval training resulted in an appointment to a destroyer in the Mediterranean, after gunnery, signals and torpedo courses. I had spent most of the last twelve months at sea and I had hoped for a little more leave during my naval training; whereas a Mediterranean appointment would mean another nine months abroad with no home leave at all. So I asked for a ship on the home station and my destroyer became an aircraft carrier, H.M.S. 'Furious'. I was upset at not getting a destroyer but realised that any further requests by me were unlikely to be favourably received. As things turned out, I was lucky once more for my nine months in 'Furious' were full of interest and valuable experience.

But first I had the courses to undergo and these started with a fortnight at the naval signal school at Portsmouth. I was always keen on signals and I enjoyed the classes. There was one incident however that added to my knowledge of naval officers and their ways.

On arrival at the school each new member was issued with an imposing collection of signal and code books classified as confidential or secret and for which he had to sign. As we had nowhere to lock them up except in our cabins it was necessary to carry them about all day, which was a bit of a nuisance. One day I was in the wardroom ante-room having a pre-lunch drink when one of the signal school staff, Lieutenant ^{Commander} Pleydell-Bouverie, engaged me in conversation. I put my books down in order to sign for my drink and when I turned round the books had disappeared. I realised at once what had happened so went straight to the 1st Lieutenant of the signal school and told him the name of the officer who had taken my books. This apparently rather upset the calculations and when I was told I had been careless with classified books I said I failed to see it as I knew quite well

who had taken them and as he had access to all secret signals books there was no question of a breach of security. I heard no more about it and my books were left alone thereafter.

Every evening after dinner there was a general exercise in morse made from the signal school masthead lamp. All officers and ratings taking signal courses were expected to read these and submit their efforts for inspection next day. For anyone arriving to take the course, like myself, only used to the standard Board of Trade eight words a minute, the speed at which the exercise was invariably made meant that you were lucky to get more than a few letters for a day or two. Then gradually the flickering light began to resolve itself into recognisable patterns and even the odd groups for things like Church pendant, Equal speed pendant and tackline unravelled themselves. I realised that this was the best way to learn morse and that starting at slow speeds and gradually working up was nothing like as effective.

At the end of the course we had a fairly searching examination and I was awarded a first class certificate which was to have some effect on my future career in the service. I did not know this then, of course, and proceeded to Devonport, where I joined H.M.S. 'Defiance', the torpedo school.

This was the least effective and impressive of any course I did in the navy and there was no examination at the end of it. I was somewhat put out to find I had been awarded a second class certificate and, on enquiry, found it was the usual practice to dole out the course results on a stripe basis. That is, the more stripes you had, the better your results. I wondered whether this was the reason for our torpedoes being such ineffective weapons.

'Defiance' was an old wooden-wall ship moored on the Cornish side of the Tamar and going ashore was a rather long and complicated business so I spent most of my leisure hours on board. There was a half-size snooker table in the wardroom, which had to be levelled up before each game because of movement of the ship. My usual opponent was the Surgeon-Commander, who had been in 'Defiance' long enough to learn a few tricks and it was quite astonishing what fearful flukes he could pull off by making use of the wash of a passing vessel. On one occasion five reds all ran into a top pocket from a rather ineffectual looking stroke at the other end of the table. It cost me a pint of beer.

From 'Defiance' I moved across the Hamoaze to 'Devonport', where I joined the gunnery school, H.M.S. 'Vivid' once more. There were quite a lot of R.N.R. sub-lieutenants doing the course, several of whom were old friends of mine. The routine was much the same as before only this time there was a good deal more night life and at week-ends I went sailing at Salcombe with N.A.F. Kingscote, another old Pangbournian. We stayed at the Temperance hotel but made sure we had a good supply of beer at all times. We each hired a dinghy from Harry Cook, who was also an old school friend of mine and we had some splendid sailing. Kingscote joined the Cunard company and retired not long ago from the post of Cunard Marine Superintendent in New York. He was one of several old Pangbournians who impressed me as being extremely pleasant, kind and completely honest. Of these I have already mentioned C.A. Milward and another was Peter MacIver. I have always regretted that our paths crossed so infrequently.

The Officers quarters at Portsmouth, Chatham and Devonport were all built to the same design. Portsmouth wardroom had magnificent murals by Wylie and at dinner, with all the silver on the long table, was most impressive.

Our cabins at Devonport, indeed the whole building, suffered from intense condensation and you could scoop water from the painted walls with your hand. I nearly always developed a severe head cold soon after joining. Otherwise, life in the barracks was comfortable and easy with good meals and a general 'club' atmosphere.

We played a lot of snooker and had rousing sing-songs using the cards issued at Divisions for hymns and patriotic songs. The patriotic songs, I seem to remember, were only sung on a Monday, perhaps because it was felt they would have a therapeutic effect on those who had over-indulged during the week-end and did not feel up to the rigours of a new week's work. At our private sing-songs, which were held in my cabin, the conductor was usually a newly joined parson named Venn but when, many years later in H.M.S. 'Warspite', I reminded him of this youthful exuberance, he indignantly denied it. Perhaps he felt it did not accord with his position as padre of the flagship!

Eventually we came to the dreaded examination again and the ~~two~~ members of the sub-lieutenants course said that they would dine me if I could get a 1st class certificate again and thereby bring reflected honour and glory on all concerned. In this, as in other examinations, my success depended entirely on my retentive memory as I could give detail - explain verbally the working of a gun and what each member of the gun's crew had to do - quite easily. Sure enough when we came to passing out in turret drill the Chief Gunner's Mate who had been our instructor called on me to give 'detail' when the inspecting officer arrived. I rattled it off almost word for word as our instructor did, including nice little touches like, "Show me that man who can make a seaman gunner out of you and I'll get him to make me a model yacht out of the same piece of wood", and "If the rammer number operates his lever before the gun loading cage is in place the rammer will flop down the

gun-well like a dead conger". This impressed and, I think, amused the examining officer so much that he gave the whole class a pass without asking any more questions, which of course put me well up in their estimation.

I got my 1st class certificate and on the last day of the course, a Saturday, my fellow sub-lieutenants dined me as promised. I cannot remember where or indeed much about the evening other than the fact that it was pretty riotous. When we came to return, the whole fourteen or so of us piled into and on two taxis - some on the tops and some on the bonnets - and returned to barracks. I sobered up enough to realise a mass entry after midnight by a noisy boisterous crowd of young 'rockies' * was likely to affect our future in the service. So I instructed the drivers to pull up 50 yards from the main gate and there mustered my cheerful colleagues and harangued them on the importance of not walking into a court martial so early in our promising careers. All agreed to behave like little gentlemen and to my intense surprise they did. All walked in past the officer of the guard, saluting smartly and disappearing into the darkness beyond the guardroom canopy. Having seen them safely in I followed on my own. The glass canopy of the guard house was held up by four iron pillars and quite methodically and astonishingly I walked slap into each one in turn. The seaman on guard collapsed hysterically and the warrant officer on duty could not restrain his mirth. As I walked also into the darkness my revolting messmates were rolling about laughing uncontrollably. Their remarks were unprintable. It was a memorable evening but, oh dear, what a fearful headache I had next day.

Complete with headache and looking very pale and frail, I caught the train for Portsmouth in the morning. Not long after the train had started the guard came along to my compartment and asked if I would like a luncheon basket as, if so, he would order it by telegraph at the next stop.

* 'rockies' - R.N.R. personnel.

Feeling not quite so sub-human by this time I assented gratefully and in due course the luncheon basket was handed in to me at one of our stops. It was, of course, a Sunday and I was somewhat surprised on opening the basket to find two bottles of Guinness inside. At that moment the guard arrived and asked if everything was in order. I said indeed it was and how thoughtful of him to order two bottles of Guinness, which would no doubt help to cure my hangover.

A large hand reached out to one of the bottles. "Not two bottles, sir, only one. The other is mine". He then went on to explain that as it was a Sunday I would not have been able to get a drink at all without his good-will and connections. I expressed real gratitude and found the cold chicken and salad excellent.

I joined H.M.S 'Furious' on the 14th May 1927 and I think it is true to say that during the two months I had been doing courses I had not had a day's leave. Things are very different today when seafarers expect something like one days leave for every three worked.

I was a bit overawed by "Furious's" wardroom ante-room, which had to accommodate about 100 officers when the flights were on board. In the only other large naval vessel in which I had served, the battle-ship 'King George V', I was one of a large group of midshipmen but here I was the one and only sub-lieutenant R.N.R. - a species which few, if any, of the officers in 'Furious' had ever come across before. I was given a cubicle in a flat right aft over the propellers, the other cubicles being occupied by the two flying officers R.A.F. and an engineer sub-lieutenant R.N. Mine had a large round porthole, which was too near the water to be opened at sea, a compactom (a folding washbasin affair - no running water of course), a small dressing table and a bit of hanging space for clothes. It was not quite up to P & O standard but quite comfortable and I had no complaints. I had a cheerful marine servant who looked after me very well indeed

for a 'wage' of 10/- a month. He also looked after the Surgeon-Lieutenant, who fortunately was about my size and had a very much more extensive wardrobe than I had. So if I ran out of boiled shirts or collars my servant would borrow from the doc. who, he said, had so many that he would not miss one.

After a day or so to 'hang my hammock' as the navy expression goes, I was appointed 'Tanky' or navigator's assistant. The navigator was a Lieutenant-Commander named Bridge and the Captain ^{was} Reggie Henderson. As 'Tanky' my station was on the bridge and I soon found myself conning the ship under the watchful eye of the navigator or Captain, or both.

Unlike modern carriers, 'Furious' had no permanent superstructure on the flight deck. When landing aircraft on or flying them off, the ship was conned from a sort of large cockpit on the starboard side. A similar position on the port side was occupied by the Wing Commander R.A.F. and his staff. When the ship was on passage from one place to another and her aircraft were not operating, a funny little square box of a bridge was produced from below the forward end of the flight deck, like the demon appearing through a trap door in a pantomime. The 'funnels' were two large wire-mesh covered openings right aft on either side of the flight deck with water sprays to keep the smoke and heat down as the planes came in to alight on deck. Woe betide the officer of the watch who forgot to give the order 'Smoke down' before a plane came in. If he did the plane would probably balloon upwards in the hot air current and either fail to get on the deck or make a very spectacular landing. The unofficial penalty imposed on the offending officer of the watch was drinks all round for the flight involved.

I soon settled down to the routine in 'Furious'. There were only five watchkeeping officers, of whom one was permanently detached to run the drifter 'Cloud'. This was a rather ancient East Coast

fishing vessel which acted as main liberty boat and stores transport. The stores at times consisting of new 'Lion' aeroplane engines which, ~~it~~ loaded on the foredeck, gave 'Cloud' a top heavy appearance, ~~which~~ ^{and} no doubt ^{it} was justified.

The watchkeepers normally kept a "day on" every other day, the watches being divided into 'Forenoon', 'First dog', 'First' and ^{Morning} ~~Relieve Decks~~ for the officer keeping 1st Day on and 'Afternoon' ~~Last dog~~ and 'Middle' for the 2nd Day on. As one also had one's other duties to perform as well, it was anything but an easy life.

As 'Tanky' I was responsible for all chart and navigation book corrections and as 'Furious' had a full set of nine chart folios, with an average of twenty or more charts in each, it was no easy task to keep up with the corrections given in the weekly 'Notices to ~~Mariners~~ ^M. In addition I was second officer of a division and officer of quarters of the port after 6" gun battery.

At this time my Lords of the Admiralty were anxious for naval officers to become air-minded and used to air travel. It was also suggested that all naval officers should have a working knowledge of air navigation, so that if necessary they could act as navigator of a two-seater plane in which they were taking passage. To this end a Junior Officer's Air Course was instituted and the first one held in 'Furious'. I cannot remember whether I volunteered but I found myself a member and in due course we got round to actual flying.

I was detailed to fly in one of the reconnaissance machines Blackburn/ known as a 'Blackburn' and piloted by a Flying Officer Bowles. Having by this time seen some hundreds of flight deck take-offs and landings I was not unduly perturbed by the prospect and, in fact, had taken steps to see that I got a very good pilot. After the usual briefing at which I was told that as observer it would be my duty to release two pigeons at distances of one mile and two

miles from the ship, we all proceeded to the flight decks to embark. On deck were two flights of Dart torpedo planes and in front of them the reconnaissance planes with the one Bowles was flying the foremost of all. Wing Commander Pulford came across from the flight control position and said cheerfully:-

"I didn't realise you had an extra passenger, Bowles. You haven't got much of a take off but I think she'll do it". Bowles, always imperturbable, agreed casually enough but I felt it was a matter for more than probability. The sea did not look very inviting. However, we climbed aboard, me carrying the wicker basket with the pigeons in it and 'Furious' was soon up to the necessary speed to give 30 knots wind speed for take-off. The plane's engines were roaring away mightily and the whole aircraft vibrated and rocked. Down went the green flag and slowly, very slowly the Blackburn started to trundle the astonishingly few feet to the forward end of the flight deck. Somewhat to my surprise she started to lift and then as we cleared the deck, down went the nose and we swooped down to wave-top level so that I was looking back and upwards to the flight deck astern. As our speed increased, Bowles banked away and started to climb so that I got a good view of 'Furious' and her two escort destroyers dropping away below.

The pigeons! I had forgotten the pigeons. They were obviously going to have rather more than a mile or two to fly back to 'Furious' but I soon had one out and as instructed flung it as high as I could clear of the cockpit. Alas, the slipstream was too powerful and the poor bird hit the rudder and disintegrated into a cloud of feathers. The second bird I managed to get clear but again, alas, it never reported back to 'Furious' and I imagine the idea of using pigeons as a means of communication from aircraft down in the sea was probably abandoned.

All aircraft operating from 'Furious' had low landing speeds and no arrester wires were used. In the year I spent in 'Furious' some thousands of deck landings were made without accident.

On one occasion a Dart torpedo plane had its torpedo slip forward and take a large chunk off both propellor blades. Of course the engine began to race and heat up and the pilot signalled for an emergency landing. 'Furious' was not head to wind or up to the speed required for landing-on but by the time the Dart came in conditions were fairly good and the pilot made a perfectly good touch down. He was a young Lieutenant R.N. and had not long completed his deck landing training so it was an excellent piece of work.

The landing-on procedure was quite simple but naturally very much affected by weather conditions. For flying off or on, 'Furious' would be worked up to the speed necessary to produce 30 knots windspeed over the deck. This would mean a 32 knot ship speed in no wind and just enough speed for steerage way in a 30 knot wind. As an experiment, Squadron Leader Howe landed a Fairy Flycatcher fighter plane on deck with a 40 knot wind and the ship going astern but it was obviously judged that this was a manoeuvre for emergencies only.

A Canadian R.A.F. officer named Boyce landed a Flycatcher with floats on the flight deck as an experiment. It did not do the floats any good (they were unserviceable ones anyway) but the landing was smooth and unspectacular. Another experiment I remember was landing a plane with brakes fitted. This was not quite so successful as the brakes were not properly co-ordinated and the plane waltzed all over the flight deck. All the poor inventor (one of 'Furious' pilots) got for his trouble was a suggestion that he should "take it on the halls".

Right at the forward end of the foc'sle 'Furious' had a steam jet and there was a white line painted along the fore and aft line. When the ship was dead into the wind the plume of steam lay right along the white line. It was easy to see how much the ship was off the wind and, when flying planes on, Captain Henderson would watch the steam jet hawk-eyed and sharply remind the officer

of the watch if there was an obvious gap between the plume of steam and the white line. On the bulkhead by the compass binnacle was an air speed indicator and as soon as a plane was given the order to land on, the officer of the watch would increase speed to give 30 knots air speed, bring the ship dead into the wind and give the order 'smoke down' so that the water sprays were switched on and the smoke and heat from the funnels aft driven down on to the water.

As soon as a plane was safely on deck and there was no question of the pilot having to overshoot, a large perforated metal screen went up on the forward side of the forward lift. The flight deck crew would secure the plane, fold the wings back and down the lift it would go. As soon as the lift started to ascend again another plane would be signalled to land on. Sometimes the after lift would be used as well and I remember seeing a Blackburn 'Blackburn' land on with both lifts down. The landing speed of these rather clumsy looking reconnaissance planes was only about 40 knots and if the pilot lined himself up too far astern it would often take quite a long time for the aircraft to catch up with 'Furious'. As mentioned earlier, no arrester wires were used at that time and certainly were not necessary for the planes operated. But towards the end of my year in 'Furious' we got a flight or flights of a new reconnaissance plane, the Fairy 3F and these had a landing speed of 70 knots, I believe, and it was no easy job to make them stick.

On one occasion when we were doing deck landing training for flights from Gosport and were operating off the Isle of Wight, I was officer of the watch. Both the Captain and Navigator were on the bridge as we were landing planes on and I had been carefully watching a big merchant ship approaching on a collision course on our starboard bow. There were two more planes to land but the other ship was getting pretty close and showed no signs of altering so I asked the Navigator for permission to negative landings and

alter course under the other vessel's stern. He said 'No' and sharply suggested that the other vessel must see we were operating aircraft and would keep out of our way. Not at all happy, I pointed out that to the best of my knowledge the International Regulations for preventing collisions at sea said nothing about ships having to keep clear of aircraft carriers; it was merely suggested that single ships should keep clear of squadrons.

Captain Henderson turned to the navigator and said quietly, 'I think we had better let Middleton have his way, Bridge. He probably knows the merchant ship mentality better than we do'. The navigator gave in gracefully, the negative landing signal was made and I took 'Furious' round under the other vessel's stern. She proved to be a German ship and obviously had no intention of abrogating her rights under the rule of the road.

Soon after I joined, 'Furious' proceeded north to the Moray Firth with all the flights on board and in company with the rest of the Home Fleet. While we were in Scottish waters Admiral of the Fleet Lord Jellicoe and Admiral Dreyer flew off to the ship. I have a photograph of them on the flight deck with Captain Henderson. The difference in size of the two Admirals is quite astonishing. Admiral Dreyer was at the Admiralty at the time of the Invergordon mutiny and, of course, closely involved in the decisions.

After various manoeuvres and a great deal of flying in northern waters the Fleet split up to show the flag at various ports and seaside resorts. 'Furious' proceeded north about through the Pentland Firth and I joined our drifted 'Cloud' for the passage to Ardrossan through the Caledonian canal. I was immensely pleased at having the chance of making the transit of the canal and seeing more of the magnificent Scottish scenery. We left 'Furious' at Invergordon and proceeded to Inverness, where we spent the night tied up alongside a distillery.

There were no free samples. Next morning we proceeded into Loch Ness accompanied by two or three other drifters from the fleet. It was a really glorious June morning and the Loch was like glass. After we had been steaming for about half an hour, one of the other drifters, which had dropped well astern, made a signal to say she had engine trouble and would not be able to proceed for about twenty minutes. We stopped and considered having a bathe but were deterred by the very cold water of the loch. I was on the bridge watching the drifter about a mile or two astern when a large black object appeared about halfway between us. It looked like a large black fish or a whale sounding. It was quite smooth and black with no sign of a head or tail. Writing to my mother about the passage of the canal I mentioned this incident saying that it looked as if there were some big fish in the Loch. Some considerable time afterwards she sent me a cutting headed 'Loch Ness Monster', with a note on it, 'Here's your big fish'. Several of us saw this and as we were all seamen trained in keeping a good look-out, there was no doubt about it.

The trip through the canal was most enjoyable. At times I would jump ashore and run along the bank to the next lock in order to have the gates ready. The weather was beautiful and we spent one night at Fort Augustus and one at Corpach before proceeding down the nine consecutive locks of 'Neptune's ladder' into Loch Linnhe.

Proceeding south through the Sound of Islay we arrived at Ardrossan after a rather rough passage round the Mull of Kintyre to find 'Furious' was operating from Larmlash. On arrival there I rejoined 'Furious' and became immediately involved in training for a fleet regatta to be held in Weymouth bay. I was in one of three whaler's crews and put into very strict training. No smoking, no gin and about two hours pulling at a heavy sweep every day. My backside was raw after two outings and I had to take a pillow with me as protection.

From the Clyde 'Furious' proceeded to Tenby where Captain Henderson had relations and this was my first visit to the Pembrokeshire town, which I was to visit many times afterwards. I remember little of this first visit to Tenby except that I went into the Church and saw a window dedicated to members of the Henderson family. Captain Henderson subsequently became a Rear-Admiral and then 3rd Sea Lord. He died in harness, I believe from overwork. Although the contact between a post Captain and a Sub-Lieutenant R.N.R. was naturally far from intimate, he was always pleasant and encouraging and before I left 'Furious' he asked me if I would like to transfer to the Royal Navy as a Fleet Air Arm observer as he thought he might be able to arrange it. This was indeed an honour, particularly at that time, and I gave the matter a great deal of thought before deciding that I preferred the best of both worlds - to be an officer in the P & O Company and an R.N.R. officer. Captain Henderson seemed to agree that I might possibly be right in my choice. Although I would have been better off in the navy, I do not think I have ever regretted my decision, in spite of the fact that three or four years later the depression brought a slump in shipping and very hard times for merchant seamen.

On the way from Tenby to Portland I found myself keeping the middle watch when the ship was rounding Land's End. When I came on the bridge at midnight both the Captain and Navigator were there with the officer of the watch. I could see the Longships, Wolf Rock and Lizard lights all flashing away merrily and it was a fairly calm, clear night. 'Furious' was on the course to a position south of the Lizard and her attendant destroyer keeping station on her starboard quarter. We were doing about 20 knots.

"I think we can leave the ship in Middleton's hands now, Bridge," said Captain Henderson and wishing me a pleasant watch they left me in charge of the carrier and her escort. About twenty minutes later a white light suddenly appeared fine on the starboard bow followed by another, fine on the port bow. I altered course 10° to starboard. Almost immediately three or four white lights appeared ahead and to starboard. It was obviously a fishing fleet - pilchard catchers, no doubt. I altered back to port, clear of the first lights that had appeared. On went another four or five lights. A considerable portion of the horizon ahead was now filled with white lights and more were going on. I made a tentative further alteration to port to see the effect, which was quite startling as about a dozen more white lights appeared. In any case I did not want to close the shore at 20 knots, so under 20 degrees of helm back we came to starboard until I could see what appeared to be a reasonably large gap in the line of lights. Fortunately no more came on as at that moment the Captain's voice-pipe whistle went and he enquired calmly, "whats going on?" I explained briefly and assured him that I had found a suitable gap and did not expect to make any more violent alterations, which appeared to reassure him as he did not come up. Then I suddenly remembered our destroyer. Quickly I looked aft and could not see her but the signalman on watch assured me she was there. 'Right up under our stern and hidden by the flight deck'.

"When she is in sight make^x O.O.W to O.O.W. Sorry I forgot you", I said.

Shortly afterwards the signalman brought me the reply.

"I was holding tight to your skirt, mum".

I was twenty-three years of age and felt a lot of satisfaction at being trusted with complete control of that big ship and her destroyer, steaming 20 knots or more up channel at night!

^x Office of the Watch

During the summer leave period my fiancée, Vera Ferris, and her friend, Marjorie Dickinson, came down to Portsmouth and had tea on board after a tour of the ship. I remember taking them up on to the flight deck, where the fresh wind blowing was rather too much for them and we retreated to shelter pretty quickly.

After the leave period 'Furious' embarked all her flights and proceeded north again. With all the flights on board there were about 100 officers in the wardroom, of which about a quarter were R.A.F. Pilots and observers were supposed to be available for watchkeeping duties 24 hours after flying and up to 24 hours before flying. The result of this rule was that we could never catch them for watchkeeping at sea or during short spells in harbour as they always claimed that they had just flown or were just about to fly. So the five 'salthorse' watchkeepers got very little respite. However, someone had the bright idea that the R.A.F. officers ought to be able to do O.O.W in harbour and Captain Henderson agreed. So we had the unusual spectacle of an R.A.F. Flying Officer, in breeches and puttees, telescope under arm, patrolling the quarter deck and running the routine with an odd mixture of R.A.F. slang and naval parlance. People came from far and wide to see the strange phenomenon!

At the end of the summer leave period I met my air course pilot, Flying Officer Bowles, in Totterdells Hotel, just off Portsmouth Hard. (This one time favourite haunt of naval officers is, I regret to say, no longer in existence. A victim of the blitz, I believe). Bowles had just returned from leave and in response to my enquiry confirmed that he had had a wonderful time.

"But a funny thing happened to me on my way back," he said, unconsciously using a hackneyed but useful expression. He went on to explain that he decided to have a night in town on his way from the north to Portsmouth and after a very cheery evening hitting the

high spots he was fortunate enough to meet a young and charming female who generously invited him to stay the night at her flat in Maida Vale. "Of course, I accepted", said Bowles.

"Early next morning" he continued, "I awoke to the sound of a street seller crying 'Ripe Strawberries' and thought it would be a nice gesture to offer some to my warm-hearted hostess for breakfast."

"It was a lovely sunny Sunday morning and just eight o'clock by my watch. Looking out of the window I saw the strawberry man pushing his barrow round the next corner so picking up a tenshilling note from the dressing table I dashed down stairs and out of the front door just as I was, in my pyjamas and with bare feet. When I got to the corner the barrow was just disappearing round another corner so I belted along the road and eventually caught up with the barrow. The strawberries looked delicious and the barrow boy did not turn a hair at his unusually dressed customer. But then came a snag. As I started to walk back I realised I had no idea of the number of the house or even the name of the street it was in. If I had heard them the night before I had completely forgotten. After two or three casts I failed to pick up the scent and was wondering what the blazes to do next when round the corner came a policeman. He eyed me with a slightly questioning look but no tinge of surprise. "Been strawberrying I see, sir", he suggested. I told him my predicament. "Now what might the young lady's name be, sir?" he enquired. I said it was Maisie but her surname escaped me for the moment. "Ah, yes, charming", he said appreciatively. "No. 17, just round the corner is where she lives. Please give her my regards", and he strolled on, no doubt musing on the essential humanity of law and order*.

I thought it was an entirely charming anecdote but the barmaid, who was a friend of his, gave Bowles a rather dirty look.

I now reverted to command of Drifter 'Cloud', which being a more or less independent command was quite good fun but the living accommodation was a bit rough with no electric light and no heating.

Cosmo Graham, our Commander, decided that 'Furious' must put on a show and somehow or other I found myself detailed to do a duo-dancing act with one of the pilots named Vallance. This was worked into a sketch in which we were two seamen in cells for some misdemeanour and Anthony Kammins ('While parents sleep' and other comedies) was the Master-at-Arms. There were also other sketches, mostly stolen from current revues. Vallance and I worked very hard and achieved a fairly snappy routine composed almost entirely of Charleston steps. Somehow or other we got out of our cells and into dinner jackets with opera hats, which were much more effective, being opened and shut, than the old top hat and cane drill.

On the big night 'Furious' and the rest of the Home Fleet were anchored below the Forth bridge. One of the lieutenants, I think it was Torlesse, kindly offered to take over my drifter trips that day so I could attend the dress rehearsal and celebrate after the show.

As far as I can remember the show was a great success, helped no doubt by a good deal of encouraging Plymouth gin before dinner. Some of the actors apparently continued their efforts to get flying speed after dinner and this was certainly evident in one ^{item} sketch. This sketch had a spiritualism theme and the black-out line came from the butler,

"The spirits have all departed".

Unfortunately, he had got into the part so well that the missing whisky might well have gone down his throat as he fluffed into,

"Whishkie has all-ll deparshted".

This infuriated Cosmo Graham, who was taking the part of the master of the house and he booted the unfortunate butler so hard he nearly ended up amongst the audience. They loved it, of course.

There was lots of celebration afterwards and I was glad to have someone to drive 'Cloud' back to Port Edgar.

Most of the time 'Furious' was flying planes in the North Sea and only came in to May island to anchor at night. Every day we ploughed down the Firth in 'Cloud' with stores, provisions and mail, sometimes with one or more 'Lion' engines on the foredeck. I made myself unpopular with Cosmo Graham by saying I wanted written instructions to carry these heavy cases across the drifters cable as it meant I could not let go an anchor, which was unseamanlike and dangerous. I may say I also thought 'Cloud' was unstable with so much weight so high up but I had no means of working out her metacentric height and proving this. Off May island there would frequently be a considerable sea running and 'Cloud' would develop a nasty slow roll.

Every so often 'Cloud' had to have 24 hours or so off for boiler cleaning and tube maintenance. On one occasion there was more than usual to do and I had to make a signal to 'Furious',

"Chief Engineer informs me he is unable to complete repairs and raise steam in order to make today's trip to May island".

Like a flash Cosmo Graham replied:-

"B - the Chief Engineer. You are to sail as ordered".

To this I replied:-

"Y 1056 " the 1056 being the time of origin of the previous signal and the Y signifying 'Your signal timed 1056 received and understood'. Followed two minutes later by another signal:-

"Still cannot proceed as ordered".

All these signals went on the big notice board in the alleyway outside the wardroom and caused great hilarity.

For the passage south again in November 'Cloud' sailed in company with several other fleet drifters from Port Edgar and the senior officer was a Lieut-Commander who led the way. As we came under the Forth bridge the whole Home Fleet was getting under way and the leading drifter headed out of the main channel and north of one of the small islands on that side. It was clear we would all go aground if we continued so I made 'U' (international signal 'You are standing into danger') on the whistle and headed back to the main channel. It was a rather undignified retreat under the eyes of all the big ships.

On the way south I put in at 'Grimsby' for coal and water, which was very convenient as my Aunt and Uncle lived there. Dr Byron Turner was well known in Grimsby and my Aunt Florence ran a delightful, comfortable home. I spent an extremely pleasant night there and have always considered this the most warmly hospitable house I have ever stayed in.

We sailed again fairly early next morning and as we came out of the Royal Dock the trawlers were coming out of the Fish Dock. Just clear of the entrance two great big rusty Iceland trawlers came up on either side of 'Cloud' and jammed her between them. They were much bigger than we were and held 'Cloud' firmly in their grip. Even going full speed astern had no effect. The trawlers' crews all appeared to be in a state of some inebriation, several walking about in nothing but a shirt, which one or two topped off with a bowler hat. They were all offering quart bottles of beer and other drinks to my crew and the trawler skippers were cordially inviting me to sup with them in their wheelhouses. Making the best of a somewhat undignified bad job, I enquired when they proposed to release us, to which they replied that they had it in mind to take us to Bear island. However, somewhere clear of Spurn point they sheered away and with warm expressions of esteem we parted company, the trawlers heading away for the northern

fishing grounds and 'Cloud' to the southward. The weather deteriorated steadily as we steamed south and crossing the Thames estuary the wind had risen to gale force from the southwest. By the time we were off the North Foreland it was dark and even under the lee of the land conditions were very unpleasant. We were all well aware of what things would be like when we rounded the South Foreland and got the full force of the storm.

I well remember that night. There were three drifters in company and as we drew clear of the cliffs past St. Margaret's Bay the seas were big and steep. Our companions made no further efforts at station keeping and at times their masthead lights and side lights were all horizontal. We were taking heavy water over forward and our top speed of seven knots was barely giving us headway. There was obviously no chance of our making our way down channel that night and we all made for the eastern entrance to Dover harbour. There was a considerable sea running inside the harbour and when we berthed alongside the lee side of the Prince of Wales Pier the ships were ranging up and down violently. It was pretty clear that they could not stay there. Fortunately a harbour official saw our plight and said we could lock in to the Granville dock and so, wet, cold and hungry, we eventually found a safe berth.

The weather did not improve next day and after baths and a general clean up at the Lord Warden hotel, having received instructions from 'Furious' to wait for the weather to moderate, we set out to see what amusements Dover had to offer. I do not think it had very much but by evening we were prepared to settle for anything warm and dry, which was more than the drifters could offer, so we all went to the movies. The theatre we chose looked respectable enough outside but inside we found that in place of the more normal seats, here they provided couches or 'Chesterfields' as they were known then. Few of the audience appeared to be taking much interest in the screen and it

was soon clear that a number of females had what might be described as "roving commissions". No doubt it was all good, clean fun but I do not remember anything quite like it anywhere else in the world.

There is something about Dover in which it differs from any other port or town in which I have been. It seems to have an atmosphere, a way of life, entirely different from anything one meets in other harbours. People react differently.

Possibly this is because of the constant flow of people and cars in and out of the town and on and off the ferries, leaving the town itself in a state of turmoil. I do not believe Dover has ever been a happy town.

The weather having improved, we sailed from Dover and arrived at Portsmouth where I was soon back to routine, running liberty trips and stores from 'Furious', anchored at Spithead, and Marlborough pier in H.M.S. 'Vernon'. My last trip was at 11.0 p.m. (we did not use the 24 hour clock in those days) and it took me nearly an hour to get to the ship. By the time I was back in harbour again it was nearly 1.0 a.m. and we had a trip off at 7.0 a.m. Sometimes I asked permission to remain at Spithead if weather conditions were good but we could not ^{lie} be alongside 'Furious' because of the overhang of her flightdeck and it was never very comfortable lying astern. This big overhang made it necessary to have a big catamaran alongside the quarter deck for 'Cloud' to berth on, and as 'Furious' used to sail about all over the place when it was blowing it could be very difficult coming alongside.

On one occasion during the afternoon I brought 'Cloud' ~~alongside~~ in rather faster than usual as I could see 'Furious' was starting to swing and I wanted to make fast before she moved too far. The result was that the catamaran capsized, 'Cloud's' stern caught under 'Furious's' stern anchor, lifted it up and dropped it with an almighty

crash which echoed through the ship. Almost immediately Captain Henderson appeared on deck, noted that no damage had been done and called out to me:-

"Don't bother to knock next time you call, Middleton".

That November my father was being installed as Mayor of Acton and I asked Cosmo Graham for leave to attend the ceremony. He said "Yes, if you can find anyone to take over the drifter, Middleton". This, of course, was the snag; nobody wanted the job at any price. However, a very nice Australian submariner named Brooks gallantly agreed to take my place and off I went. My father was made Mayor with due ceremony - I think he was 72 years of age and looked a young sixty - and my mother made a very charming mayoress. I returned to Portsmouth on the Sunday night and repaired to Marlborough pier to resume my command of 'Cloud'. When I got to the pier there was no sign of 'Cloud' but presently some officers from 'Furious' arrived so I asked if they knew where she was. "Alongside", they said. We walked to the edge of the pier and there, down below, lay 'Cloud', devoid of funnel and most of her superstructure. Obviously she had hit the flight deck overhang.

"Good heavens", I cried, "Did Brooks do that?"

"Oh, no", came the reply, "He had half a dozen shots to get alongside and failed, so the Navigator, who was on board, said he would do it. And he did!"

Returning from Spithead after a late trip, we were just entering Portsmouth harbour and just about abreast of the Sally Port when 'Cloud's' wheelhouse was suddenly filled with a ghostly light. The coxswain and I looked at one another's green faces in amazement and then realised that right alongside us, only a few feet away, was a destroyer which had crept up astern.

The ghostly glow came from her starboard sidelight and a voice from her bridge, I imagine it was her Captain's, said reprovingly,

"That will teach you not to keep a look-out astern!"
and with a faint clanging of her revolution counter gongs they wound on a few more knots and shot ahead up harbour.

Although I ate in solitary state in my rather stark and cold sleeping cabin, I messed with the crew of 'Cloud' and was always more than grateful that this resulted in considerable mess savings. At the end of each month the coxswain used to pay over to me my share of the surplus from the messing allowance and I often wondered how we fed so well so cheaply. But one day when we were alongside 'Furious' discharging stores I thought I noticed the odd cheese or carton of eggs, although counted over the side, seemed to get back on board by some clever sleight of hand. I had an idea that if I asked to see the messing accounts for 'Cloud' there would have been an astonishing lack of items purchased.

In December, 'Furious' went into Portsmouth harbour and alongside ready to give Christmas leave. Owing to the shortage of officers on board when the flights were ashore (they were always flown off before going alongside), I was promoted from ordinary watchkeeper to 'officer of the day', a duty normally only carried out by an officer of the rank of Lieut-Commander in a capital ship. For an R.N.R. sub-lieutenant this was quite an honour. While I was on duty during the leave period the Engineer Commander had to report something or other and came up to me, saluted smartly and made his report. As the Senior Executive officer on board I was for the time being in command of 'Furious' and he treated me accordingly. I don't suppose anyone would blame me for sticking my chest out a little bit further.