

CAPTAIN ERIC HEWITT, THE LAST CAPTAIN OF THE CADET TRAINING SHIP HMS CONWAY

Ninety one year old Captain Eric Hewitt RD, RNR, the last captain of the training ship **HMS CONWAY**, died on 13th December 1995.

He was born on 18th July 1904 at Fenton, Staffordshire, the second of four sons, where his father owned the Fenton Pottery business. He wanted to join the Royal Navy, sat and passed the Dartmouth entrance exam at thirteen, but reminiscing Hewitt considers that perhaps because his father was in trade, or in today's terminology business, he failed the interview. The **CONWAY** was his second choice. He joined her on 1st May 1919 and left in April 1921. In his final term he recalls that he was academically "top of the class", earned a Double[1] Extra Conway Certificate, but never became a cadet captain and remained a working hand although in his last term he was a working hand captain of the water-boat[2]. On leaving the **CONWAY** he joined the Royal Naval Reserve and was appointed a probationary midshipman. The first four months of his training was aboard the aircraft carrier **HMS ARGUS** followed by two months aboard the destroyer **HMS WITHERINGTON**. After his RNR training he served his apprenticeship with the Glen Line and on his first two voyages called at Vladivostok. Following the Revolution the country was still suffering unrest and civil war, and 1921 was the time of severe famine. In this by-gone era, on-shore, the young Hewitt witnessed many atrocities.

Years later one of his shipmates, George Cochrane, who had been with him on his Vladivostok voyages, wrote a play, "Maiden Voyage". The hero was modelled on Hewitt, and with his wife and son, Michael, they attended its first night at Bournemouth in the winter of 1963. June 1924 he passed his 2nd Mate's Certificate at Liverpool, and in August 1924 joined the Royal Mail Line. His first voyage with them was aboard the **CARMARTHENSHIRE**[3] to the Baltic. After passing his 1st Mate's (Foreign Going) Certificate in 1927, just before his twenty third birthday, he was promoted lieutenant RNR. Subsequently he completed the Submarine Qualifying Course in June/July 1927 and served a year in submarines, which the Board of Trade accepted as full sea time. While serving as an RNR officer he was used as an extra in the silent film "Q Ships", in which Conrad Veidt starred as a U-Boat captain. Hewitt's part was as a German naval rating, with Veidt as the U-boat captain. On film Veidt appeared to give the orders, but in actual fact it was Hewitt conning the submarine. After obtaining his Master's (Foreign Going) Certificate in 1930 he married (got spliced to) Marjorie his sweetheart from his **CONWAY** days. With a Master's Certificate, like most RNR officers, he specialized in navigation. His RNR training continued in submarines until he was promoted lieutenant commander in 1936, when he returned to surface craft.

Although only second officer he had built-up a reputation for efficiency, and, several pre-war Royal Mail Line officers consider that he would have been made a marine superintendent if it had not been for the war. In December 1938, while still serving as second officer, the Company sent him on a six weeks ARP (Air Raid Precautions) course. They told him he had been selected because he was the only Conway in the Company with a Double Extra Conway Certificate. He expressed surprise as this was the first he knew about it. They explained that there was a red pencil star on the top left hand corner of his Extra Certificate. After completing the course he spent a fortnight in Royal Mail Line House (Leadenhall Street) preparing a series of six lectures. His brief was to prepare the Royal Mail Line fleet of about thirty ships and their officers for war, and he travelled to Liverpool, London, Southampton and Rotterdam boarding the ships and lecturing and teaching the officers about gas attack[4]. He had a sort of gas van through which the personnel went with and without gas masks. Strange though it may seem the idea was that participants would experience the difference between the van filled with gas or gas free, and he became know as "Flour Bags[5]" Hewitt. Scotland Yard[6] issued him with a certificate to carry and use poison gases in appropriate places. He wrote a manual, which was used by Royal Mail

Line's officers. At that time Royal Mail Line's RNR officers, when doing their naval training aboard **HMS PRESIDENT**, were astonished to see that Hewitt's manual had been produced as a classified book. They reported this to Royal Mail, and the Company asked the Admiralty to recompense Hewitt for the book. Unfortunately for him it was against Admiralty policy to pay officers for writing text books[7]. However, they agreed to note it in his record, when it would be considered and regarded favourably during his RNR career. In October 1939 Hewitt received an appreciative letter for his work from the Admiral Commanding Reserves.

During this period of giving practical demonstrations the poison gas attacked his skin, and despite Marjorie applying calamine lotion to his back and chest it caused him intense discomfort. He asked to be released from this assignment. Subsequently, Captain F.G. Spriddell CBE the Marine Superintendent sent him away on a one week's coasting voyage as **LOMBARDY's** first officer[8] sailing from Victoria Dock (London) and returning to Victoria Dock (London). Afterwards he was given a fortnight's leave and took his family down to the South Coast. On coming home in the last week of July he says he found the red call-up telegram nailed to his front door. So, with the rank of lieutenant commander, he hurried to Devonport to report for active service. His job was to assist prepare the base for defence against air attack. After ten days he was sent to Greenock, where he joined a Gibraltar bound transport and was actually at sea when war was declared (3rd September 1939). In the rush he had left his gas samples in a suitcase under the bed at home. His home was not on the telephone so he telephoned a neighbour to collect them and hand them in at the police station. But it needed a telephone call to Scotland Yard before the local police would accept the suitcase. When telling the story Hewitt ended with saying that if his house had been bombed the Germans would have been accused of waging chemical warfare. (In the summer of 1940 the house was bombed).

The Cunard White Star **ALAUNIA** (14,030 grt) arrived in London from Montreal on 24th August 1939. She was requisitioned by the Admiralty and put on a T98A charter. She was sent to Gibraltar, where Hewitt joined her. She was painted battleship grey and fitted out as an armed merchant cruiser with six 6" guns. He served aboard her on North Atlantic convoy duty[9]. She escorted the homeward convoy half way across the Atlantic, where she about turned with an outward bound convoy towards Halifax. One night at a dinner ashore his hosts suggested that his children should be evacuated to Halifax. He cabled Marjorie and it was agreed that his two daughters should come to Halifax and his baby son remain with his mother in Britain. However, on **ALAUNIA's** next voyage, after leaving the homeward convoy, she was ordered to join a convoy south of Bermuda. On arriving back in Halifax in November 1940, after a six weeks absence, Hewitt was astonished to see Marjorie pushing a pram with Michael and his two daughters walking along the quay. Just how unlucky can one be? Marjorie and the three children had come out to Halifax aboard the Canadian Pacific **DUCHESS OF RICHMOND**, but Hewitt was being sent home to Britain. All a sympathetic Rear Admiral Bonham-Carter could do was give him three weeks leave to get his family settled before he returned to Britain.

The tramp steamer **MINNIE DE LARRINAGA** (5,049 grt), while discharging wheat in Surrey Commercial Docks, had been damaged severely by fire in an air raid on the London Docks on 9th September 1940[10].

On his return to Britain Hewitt was appointed to command **HM Special Service Vessel MINNIE DE LARRINAGA**. Loaded with ballast and topped with concrete, to stop the ballast moving, and dynamite she left Gravesend with two tugs forward and two tugs aft at 0945 hours, 1st February 1941. After the most harrowing 71 miles voyage imaginable Hewitt arrived in Dover at 0430 hours 5th February 1941, where the ship was taken over by the King's Harbour Master[11] and placed in position ready for the Demolition Party to sink her at 0900 as a block ship in the harbour's western entrance. Clearly, the operation's successful outcome pleased Their Lordships and they wrote:-

"I am to acquaint you that Their Lordships have read with pleasure of the skill and determination whereby Lt. Cdr. E. Hewitt, RNR in command of **MINNIE DE LARRINAGA**

surmounted many difficulties and brought an important and hazardous operation to a successful conclusion, and I am to request that you will convey to him an expression of Their Lordships' appreciation of his good service".

Afterwards he took command of the Flower Class[12] corvette **HMS ASTER** (950 tons) building at Belfast. He thought she was going to be used on North Atlantic convoy work, and if so, would occasionally he would be able to see his family. When he saw tropical gear arriving alongside his hopes of seeing his family were shattered. In May 1941 the **ASTER** sailed for Freetown with Hewitt in command. In November 1941 he was instructed to take five escorts to Cape Town for escort work there, but the situation changed with Japan's entry into the war, (7th December 1941). On 1st January 1942 he was promoted to commander.

While in Cape Town C-in-C South Atlantic ordered Hewitt with one other escort to go out and search for submarines, which had been reported in the area. Hewitt said that one of the ships had her gun out of action, and the other's ASDIC was broken down. However, he was told that the **QUEEN MARY**[13] was passing on a voyage from Suez to New York, and it was therefore imperative that they did their utmost to protect her. Neither ship expected to survive, but happily they did. In March 1942 he was ordered to take his escort group to the Far East. However, with the fall of Singapore (15th February 1942) the escort group was diverted to Colombo, where they arrived just after the Easter Sunday (26th March 1942) air raid was over.

While in Colombo Hewitt was sent to sea on an operation. The corvette HOLLYHOCK was to remain in port so Hewitt had some of her AA armament transferred to the **ASTER**.

In the middle of one night on the patrol the lookout reported a ship ahead. She was challenged. It was the cruiser **CORNWALL** in company with her sister ship **DORSETSHIRE**. On the afternoon 5th April 1942 the two cruisers were attacked and sunk by fifty three Japanese dive bombers commanded by Lt. Cdr. Egusa. Luck was with Hewitt, and he returned safely to Colombo. Incredibly he must have steamed close to the Japanese fleet without him seeing them or them seeing him. Meanwhile **HOLLYHOCK** had been sent to escort the aircraft carrier **HERMES**. In an attack by eighty Japanese dive bombers with fighter escort east of Ceylon on 9th April 1942, **HERMES** and **HOLLYHOCK** were sunk.

His next command was the sloop **SHOREHAM**. He stayed with her serving in the Indian Ocean, Persian Gulf, Red Sea and Mediterranean.

Captain Hewitt's son, Michael, has mentioned the time his Father's ship went into Tripoli[14], which was half blocked with sunken ships, on 19th June 1943 with the greeting: "Thank God you've come. The King is due later today, and we would like you to form a naval Royal Guard and command it".

During the Second World War to encourage investment in War Savings Certificates in 1941, 42 and 43 towns held Wings for Victory Week, War Weapons Week and Warship Week. It is likely that the Admiralty encouraged or perhaps instructed captains of HM ships to write to the local council after whose town a ship was named. About September 1943 Hewitt wrote to the Chairman of Shoreham Urban District Council about his briefing for the invasion of Sicily (Operation Husky[15]).

While anchored in Tripoli, with about one hundred others, he was called to a conference and briefed about the forthcoming invasion of Sicily (Operation Husky). Everyone was pleased he recalls except the Greek naval officers who were disappointed that the project was not their homeland. After the briefing the officers were escorted to their ships and prepared to sail. Once clear of Tripoli the ship's company was informed, the Top Secret orders opened and relevant charts and maps studied. The assault forces rendezvoused pm 9th July 1943: The

Americans west of Malta and the British east of Malta. He describes meeting a fleet of four battleships, two aircraft carriers, four cruisers and seventeen destroyers in the afternoon and then convoys from Britain, North African ports and the Middle East at the rendezvous. Also the weather deteriorated with a strong force 6 breeze and rough sea. However, the wind quickly abated and at 0300 10th July 1943 three American, three British and one Canadian division stormed ashore along a one hundred mile front. **SHOREHAM**, with four supporting escorts, part of Captain Lord Ashburn's Force N, led a section of support ships to the beaches east of Cape Passaro (SE corner of Sicily). Once the transports were discharged **SHOREHAM** proceeded to Malta, where she received a rousing welcome entering the Grand Harbour. On returning to Sicily, he says matter-of-factly, "the Luftwaffe gave us a warm reception".

On 13th August 1943 he was Mentioned in Dispatches after the slow (8½-9 knots) Mediterranean UK convoy MKS 21[16], with the forty ships he was escorting, was attacked by torpedo bombers of KG 26 (Major Werner Klümpler) 37 miles NW of Alboran Island. Later the Admiralty informed Hewitt that seventeen aircraft had been shot down. The German pilots exaggeratedly claimed 170,000 tons of shipping sunk. In actual fact the only casualties were the Runciman managed **EMPIRE HAVEN** (6,852 grt) and the United States Maritime Commission Liberty ship **FRANCIS W. PETTYGROVE** (7,176 grt), which were damaged by torpedo hits. **FRANCIS PETTYGROVE** was taken in tow in 36 15'N 02 23'W and arrived at Gibraltar 14th August 1943, where she was beached and declared a Constructive Total Loss. There were no casualties among her forty crew, twenty seven gunners and four passengers. **EMPIRE HAVEN**[17] was not badly damaged and was able to continue with the convoy. Admiral Andrew B. Cunningham CGB, DSO, C-in-C Mediterranean Fleet sent a general message to the Mediterranean Fleet: "I congratulate you, the escort force and convoy MKS 21 on your sturdy defence of convoy against heavy harassing attack. The enemy got a sore head he is likely to remember". After the War Major Klümpler joined the Federal German Navy and attained the rank of captain. Many years later he was involved in intense discussions about his attack on the convoy, and could not believe he had inflicted so little damage.

On his return to Ceylon Hewitt reported to Admiral Sir James Somerville C-in-C Eastern Fleet. It seems likely that Somerville thought that Hewitt would ask for a bigger ship. But he asked only for the command of the Black Swan Class sloop **FLAMINGO** (commissioned 18th April 1939), which was being refitted. Somerville's Chief of Staff replied that a commander had already been appointed. Hewitt had not seen his wife for three years, so his next request was for month's leave with his family in Nova Scotia. With some reluctance Somerville agreed, on the condition that he found his own passage. He also advised Hewitt to keep clear of the UK in case he was collared for the Second Front. No doubt, Somerville applied to the Admiralty to allow Hewitt to proceed to Nova Scotia, then the C-in-C in Halifax would be responsible for getting him to where the Admiralty wanted him.

When his relief arrived he left **SHOREHAM** and embarked aboard a transport bound for Suez, and from there travelled by train to Alexandria. He showed Somerville's signal, granting him a month's leave in Nova Scotia, to the Chief of Staff Alexandria. The Chief of Staff urged him to avoid travelling via Britain, as with the Second Front approaching and Hewitt's three and a half years escort experience he would be "roped in" for it. However, there was a 47 ship American convoy leaving for Philadelphia in the next 48 hours so he was advised to try and fix a passage. Talking to several American ship-masters at a convoy conference, three turned down his request for a passage. However, one offered him a passage on the understanding that he could find a fourth for bridge. The American explained that he and his chief engineer had not had game of bridge since leaving Newport News a couple of months ago. Hewitt knew a lieutenant RCNVR was trying to return home to the Bay of Fundy for leave. Hewitt's luck was in; the Canadian was a bridge player. They embarked aboard an American Liberty ship as she sailed outward through the boom from Alexandria. Although himself a good bridge player, Hewitt warned the Canadian that he was a little apprehensive about the stakes. At that time he thought that an AB in the American Merchant Marine was paid more than a Royal Navy commander. But he need not have worried. The American captain explained that they played for peanuts, which could be bought

from the ship's canteen. Soon after clearing Alexandria in a slow convoy bound for Philadelphia the American captain said: "Right let's play some bridge". The 5,125 miles voyage took 28 days.

On Christmas Eve three of the crew, a sailor, an oiler and a steward knocked on Hewitt's cabin door and they asked if it was true that he was captain of one of HM ships. Hewitt assured him that he was. The men said that they had never been away from home at Christmas before and understood that captains aboard RN ships held divine service, and asked Hewitt to conduct a Christmas Day service. Hewitt explained that he was not captain of this ship but a passenger. However, providing the master approved he would be happy to do it. The men said that they had already seen the master and he had agreed to take the wheel while the chief engineer took the watch down in the engine-room. But in his small cabin, with his gear in the hold, he had neither bible nor prayer book. The Americans, however, knew that the BBC Overseas Service was broadcasting a Christmas Day service from the west country. The radio officer agreed to tune it in through a loud-speaker. With each man writing a line "Sparks" was able to prepare Hewitt a service for Christmas Day. Hewitt was at a loss to know how to start the service for the Americans, but he thought they must know the carol "Silent Night". At 1100 the three crew men came for him. The crew had assembled in their best "go-ashores", and stood in a semi circle around three 45 gallon oil drums which they had draped with coloured bunting. Hewitt started the service singing "Silent Night"; the crew proved to know this and joined in the Christmas Day (1943) service.

He returned to Britain in February 1944 aboard a Royal Mail Line transport[18], and was appointed to command the Black Swan Class sloop **WHIMBREL**[19] (1,470 tons), which became his favourite ship. Built by Yarrow on the Clyde she was commissioned on 25th August 1942, and attached to Captain "Johnnie" Walker's famous Liverpool based Second Support Group anti-submarine flotilla. After one patrol Hewitt, while still in command of **WHIMBREL**, was made escort commander in a group formed for the Normandy invasion.

On 12th December 1944 he was transferred and became Senior Officer of the 30th Escort Group in the corvette **PEVENSEY CASTLE**[20], where he remained until 9th June 1945. She was armed with the new anti submarine mortar "Squid". "Squid's" advantage was that it threw the mortar ahead of the attacking ship thus maintaining ASDIC contact. With a depth charge attack the ship lost ASDIC contact, which enabled a submarine to take avoiding action.

The Newcastle tramp company Sutherland's **MV CROMARTY**[21] (4,974 grt) sailed from Hull on 18th January 1945 bound for Halifax, and after a collision anchored in the Downs waiting to join a convoy. On 28th January 1945 while outward bound in the Channel a fire started in the pantry. Hewitt put **PEVENSEY CASTLE** alongside her (in 49 55½'N 05 25½'W) and his crew extinguished the fire which had gutted the amidship accommodation and killed one engineer. However, **CROMARTY's** main engine was workable, but she had only hand steering[22]. After the fire was extinguished she proceeded to Falmouth and anchored in Carrick Road on 28th January 1945. **CROMARTY's**[23] It may be pertinent that merchant shipping fire appliances do not include hoses fitted with spray nozzles and the Naval Fire Fighting Party equipped with these nozzles would be able to penetrate into a space too hot for the men not so equipped". crew was thought to have abandoned ship, and **PEVENSEY CASTLE** claimed salvage money, although no salvage agreement had been signed. But **CROMARTY's** master insisted that he had not abandoned ship[24]. However, from photographs taken by Coastal Command the entire crew appeared to be in her lifeboats. The First Lieutenant's father was Writer to the Signet (Scottish Law Society) and with his expert knowledge of law he was able to sort the claim out. **PEVENSEY CASTLE** got her money, and in March 1947, while in Singapore, Hewitt received a cheque for £77-7s-7d in respect of naval prize remittance for the salvage of **MV CROMARTY** by **HMS PEVENSEY CASTLE**.

At first Hewitt's group operated in the South West Approaches, and from March 1945

operated from Rosyth in the area North of Scotland. .

After VE Day (8th May 1945) Vice Admiral McGrigor aboard the cruiser **HMS NORFOLK** with the 30th Escort Group and other naval units went to Bergen to take the surrender of the German U-boats, where they received a rapturous welcome from the Norwegians. In June 1945 Hewitt flew to Ceylon and joined the staff of the Supreme Commander South East Asia Command (SEAC) Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten. Mountbatten's headquarters were in the famous Peradeniya Botanical Gardens at Kandy, and he worked his staff hard. Hewitt, with the rank of acting captain, was stationed at the shore base **HMS HATHI**. At that time, aged thirty nine, he had the distinction of being probably the RNR's youngest serving captain. He was appointed Divisional Sea Transport Officer, and on the cessation of hostilities transferred to Singapore, arriving with the first contingent of British forces on 5th September 1945. Here he was initially DSTO Malaya and later DSTO Far East. The Japanese surrender of South East Asia, with three quarters of a million Japanese forces, was signed (General Itagaki) in the Municipal Building Council Chamber the day Mountbatten arrived in Singapore, 12th September 1945^[25], and Hewitt received the sword of his surrendered Japanese counterpart.

In the godowns Hewitt found a quantity of rubber that the Japanese had left. 200 tons of it were loaded aboard the Royal Mail Line troopship **ALMANZORA** (Captain Bannister), and it was the first commercial cargo to leave Singapore for the western world since 1942. She sailed from Singapore on 17th September 1945 bound for Southampton having embarked 444 civilian internees and 1,200 ex-pows from the services.

Now, besides being in control of all British sea transport throughout the Far East, he was in charge of the shipping arrangements for the repatriation of the Allied prisoners of war and the surrendered Japanese forces. Reminiscing in later years he referred to this as his travel agent appointment.

On arriving in Singapore he was put in charge of the docks at Keppel Harbour, where he used troops to discharge the ships. But local civilian labour was needed and he was given half a million New Straits dollars (£58,343) to pay the recruited labour. With an armed guard he went to the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank, where he commandeered a safe. Then rigging sheer legs he hoisted it into the Ocean Building's first floor. Meanwhile he interviewed a group of Singapore foremen, who had worked the docks, and made an offer of one New Straits dollar a day for a dock-worker. The foremen were aghast and said that the Japanese paid ten dollars a day. Hewitt took them over to the window and pointed to piles of the Japanese "banana" money being burnt. They accepted his offer. He started with thirty men, which he increased to one hundred and fifty by the end of the week. When they were paid he made them put their thumb print on a sheet of foolscap. On being instructed to return the balance of money he took an escort of four armed servicemen to return the 495,000 dollars (£57,760) remaining. Three senior army officers and a Royal Air Force officer were court-martialled after being found with kit bags packed full of Malay dollars. Asked to account for the missing five thousand dollars (£583), Hewitt was able to produce his foolscap sheets.

One night he accepted a dinner invitation from several important Chinese businessmen, who gave him an expensive Ronson lighter, well-nigh-impossible to obtain in Britain at that time. Hewitt considered it a gift and without hesitation politely with his compliments sent it back. He soon became an unusual but familiar sight in Singapore as he drove around the city astride a powerful motorcycle.

At first in Singapore he shared a bungalow with Commodore Rudolph De Salis. One of Hewitt's nephews, Leading Hand Roderick M. Hewitt, who was in Singapore called on his uncle, and was invited to dinner. Roderick returned to his ship in the Commodore's car! In 1950 De Salis spent a long weekend (8th to 12th June 1950) aboard the **CONWAY** with Hewitt.

Mountbatten mentioned in a conversation with Hewitt that he was looking forward to

home leave, as he had not seen his wife, Lady Edwina, for eighteen months. Hewitt responded that he had not seen his wife for two years, and in sixteen years of marriage had been only with her for sixteen months. The result was that Marjorie, was the first Allied serviceman's wife to join her husband in Singapore after the cease fire.

With Marjorie now with him, on Christmas Day 1946 a Malay bearer delivered a basket of fruit. Hewitt thought that no one could object to him receiving such a gift. Marjorie picked-up the pineapple from the centre of the basket and underneath it was a sapphire and diamond brooch. Hewitt's driver, Wong, was having Christmas Day off, so Hewitt chased down the drive after the bearer. He threatened to have him shot at his bungalow unless the man told him from where the brooch came. When telling the story Hewitt always added: "Of course, I couldn't have had him shot, but he didn't know that. Anyway Marjorie always insisted the gift was for her". He found out that the gift was actually from the port workers. Hewitt reported the gift to Mountbatten. The C-in-C recommended to the Admiralty that permission should be given for the gift to be retained. But the Admiralty were not so sympathetic.

Years later, when the **CONWAY's** Captain Superintendent, he was appalled when the laundry in Pwllheli, who did the ship's laundry, sent him two white shirts at Christmas. He regarded it as a gift and reported it to the Committee. The Committee, however, considered that it was quite in order for him to accept the shirts.

Mountbatten asked all his senior staff officers to write an assessment of what they thought were Malaya's peace time prospects. Mountbatten rejected all the reports except Hewitt's. His was the only one to predict the communist insurgency, which, through top secret intelligence reports Mountbatten knew was coming.

While in Singapore he was based in Ocean Building at Collyer Quay. The building belonged to Alfred Holt & Co., and was also Mansfield's (an Alfred Holt subsidiary), office. Naturally enough Mansfield was the Blue Funnel agent.

According to Captain Hewitt's notes at some time in 1946 he received a signal from the Admiralty asking him to requisition a house for Sir John Nicholson[26], the Deputy Director of Sea Transport. Hewitt replied that all the decent houses had already been occupied, but that he had a large bungalow and would be prepared to offer hospitality if this would suit Sir John. Back came the reply: "Approved". Sir John stayed with Hewitt for three weeks, and it was as he was leaving that he asked if there was anything he could do for his host. Hewitt replied that if Sir John felt that he had been well looked after, then if his wife came out in a Blue Funnel ship would he ask her Master to look after her. It so happened that Marjorie did not travel out aboard a Blue Funnel ship. A few months after she arrived in Singapore, Hewitt received another signal asking if he would be prepared to give Sir John hospitality for 24 hours. He answered "affirmative".

Hewitt notes say: "I met him at Changi and got him to the bungalow". Sir John said, "do you know why I've come"? Hewitt replied, "no". "Well" said Sir John, "Captain Goddard is about to retire from the **CONWAY**, and we think you would be a good successor". Hewitt exclaimed, "what"! Marjorie enquired, "Isn't that one of the plums of the Merchant Navy, Sir John"? "Yes", he answered. A discussion about salary followed and Marjorie said "Sir John, we have three children to educate and I'm afraid that we couldn't afford it on what you are proposing to give us". Sir John asked "is that your final word"? Hewitt and Marjorie both said "yes". "Right" said Sir John, "there's a plane waiting for me at Changi. Could you take me back to Changi"?

The **CONWAY** was a Public School, recognized by the Board of Education, whose pupils intended going away to sea in the Merchant Navy or joining the Royal Navy. But there was a difference between the **CONWAY** and the usual Public School in that the **CONWAY** was afloat and an old three masted square rigged wooden wall.

In May 1947, while still in Singapore, Hewitt received a signal from the Admiralty to fly

to London for a 48 hours visit. The Admiralty advised him that Mountbatten[27], who had left Singapore in May 1946, wished him to join his staff in Delhi as DSTO India. Hewitt replied that he would need to consult his wife. The Admiralty replied that they had anticipated this and had prepared a cable for him to send her. They suggested, that as it was a weekend he should return on Monday to see her reply and then make his decision. Unhesitatingly she cabled back urging him to accept the appointment even though the extended service meant delaying his "demob". On accepting the Delhi appointment his rank of captain was confirmed. As he now had a free weekend he took a taxi to Orpington and Bickley Park, Kent, to collect his two younger children, and then back to a London station. He mentioned to the taxi driver that he was a little perturbed about meeting his three children. (They had travelled from Chester, Nova Scotia to New York by train, where they stayed with Commander Valentine USN, before returning to Britain aboard the US built escort carrier **HMS ARBITER**[28] in June 1944). He thought that, after two years away, his children may well regard him as a total stranger. On his arrival at the London station the taxi driver refused to accept the fare saying "let that be my contribution to the war effort". After collecting Michael and Carol they went to Abbots' Bromley, Staffordshire to meet his other child, Ann.

Mountbatten was appointed Viceroy of India on 15th March 1947. Hewitt had only been in Delhi a fortnight, when he received a bill for painting the British India's **SS TALMA's** (10,000 grt) troop decks. She was one of the ships he was using for repatriation. He thought it excessive so flew to Calcutta with a sworn measurer and had her decks measured. Next he cabled the paint manufacturer asking how many square feet a gallon of their paint covered. From the reply he received he found that the contractor was claiming enough paint to have painted her decks six times. On returning to Delhi he reported his findings to the admiral in charge. It was while Hewitt was DSTO in Delhi that Sir John Nicholson, who besides being an Alfred Holt manager was the Ministry of War Transport representative in Delhi, again mentioned the Conway appointment. Captain Hewitt's notes state "While in Delhi on Mountbatten's staff as DSTO India, I suddenly had a letter from Royal Mail Line, my peacetime employers, informing me that they had been asked to recommend one of their officers to succeed Captain Goddard as Captain of the **CONWAY**. They understood that the pay was not too good, but they had dictated a letter which they suggested I copied to them, not to the **CONWAY**, saying I thanked them for having recommended me, but that it would not be fair to accept unless certain financial inducements were made to me, and they set out what these inducements should be".

Hewitt was selected by the Conway Committee of Management for the post of the **CONWAY's** Captain Superintendent from a short list of candidates. On his appointment, as the pay offered was considerably below that of a senior Royal Mail Line chief officer, the Committee agreed to give him £600[29] a year. He was also enrolled into the Merchant Navy Officers' Pensioner Fund (MNOFF). On becoming Captain Superintendent his salary would be £900 a year for the first five years with £100 a year tax free entertaining allowance. After five years it would rise to £1,000 a year[30] and retain the £100 a year tax free entertaining allowance. He joined the **CONWAY**[31] After this incident the Committee of Management decided to shift the **CONWAY** to the Menai Strait. She left the Mersey with two tugs on 21st May 1941. In April 1948 and served aboard her as Staff Captain until Captain Goddard retired in August 1949, when he became Captain Superintendent. It was agreed that his appointment as Staff Captain would be for a trial period on both sides and Royal Mail gave a year's secondment for him to see if he wanted the job. After three years as a pukka sahib in the Far East his quarters aboard the ship were basic, with oil lamps after 2200 hours and food similar to what it was when he was a cadet. However, he liked the staff and found the same spirit of comradeship among the cadets as it had been in his time. There was one exception to the staff and that was Simon the steward. When Hewitt joined the Ship as a cadet, (Summer Term 1919), food was still rationed. There was one slice of bread at breakfast, none at midday dinner and two slices at teatime. However, for five shillings a term Simon provided a double bread sandwich at the morning break. For the others a tea chest full of hard tack was placed on the lower deck[32]. But after 27 years and knowing Simon's tricks, although food was still rationed, Hewitt was confident that Old Simon would not revert to his old ways. Hewitt reckoned that it took him less than a week to make his mind up and

decide that this was what he wanted to do. An additional incentive was the excellent Captain's quarters under the poop.

On 13th April 1949 the **CONWAY** was towed to new moorings off Plas Newydd, the home of the Marquess of Anglesey. Part of Plas Newydd was converted to accommodate one hundred cadets. It meant completely reorganizing the ship's company and with Captain Goddard only a few months from retirement the work was undertaken by Hewitt. The Ship's magazine, *The Cadet*, published each term, had through a wartime shortage of paper, ceased publication during hostilities and Hewitt was able to resume its publication.

In mid-July 1951 the **HMCS CRESCENT**^[33] commanded by Lt. Cdr. "Skinny" Hayes^[34], DSC crossed the Caernarfon Bar and anchored off Port Dinorwic. Hayes was aboard the **CONWAY** from 1936-1938 and King's Gold Medallist in 1938. Aboard the **CRESCENT** were about seventy Canadian midshipmen. Visits were exchanged between the two ships and a gig race arranged. The Canadians were on average four years older than the cadets. Captain David Nutman (50-51) remembers that the Canadians won "handsomely", but "*The Cadet*" (September 1951) records that it "was a grand and close race which we lost by a length, due probably to Collard, our stroke oar, tearing an abdominal muscle halfway through the race. He gamely pulled until the end although in agony, and was taken to hospital as soon as possible".

Outward bound she steamed north of the ship and was cheered by the **CONWAY's** cadets before leaving the Strait over Caernarfon Bar.

The BBC showed some interest in the ship, and September 1952 Richard Dimbleby was aboard recording a programme about the **CONWAY** for BBC radio's Light Programme, and the ship's nursing sister was interviewed for "Woman's Hour".

Aboard the **CONWAY** Hewitt kept a beautifully varnished mahogany sailing dinghy named **ALAUNIA**. The Admiralty finally purchased the former Cunard White Star liner in May 1944 to become a depot ship stationed at Devonport. The shipwrights aboard **ALAUNIA** at Devonport had made the sailing dinghy and her captain, an old Conway, donated her to the **CONWAY** in about January 1947. The 14 feet boat was an unusual design and proved difficult to sail. Occasionally senior competent dinghy hands were allowed to sail her in the Strait. Her hull constructed of wafer thin diagonal mahogany strips hand sewn with copper wire, was a masterpiece of the boat-builders' craft.

The **CONWAY** ran ashore in the Swellies (Menai Straits) between the Britannia Tubular Railway Bridge and the Suspension road bridge on 14th April 1953. She was being towed to Bangor on the first leg of her voyage to Birkenhead for dry-docking and re-fitting, but after grounding she broke her back and became a Constructive Total Loss. Later in the year the **CONWAY** was re-located as a "stone frigate" in the grounds of the Marquess of Anglesey's home, Plas Newydd on the Anglesey shore of the Menai Strait.

Any Old Conways who blamed Hewitt for the ship's loss were probably unaware of the full story. However, there were many who thought she had outlived her use for modern training and were not sorry to see her go. Hewitt and Pilot Richard Jones wanted three tugs. However, the Conway Committee of Management's Honorary Shipwright, (W.H. Dickie from the Blue Funnel Line) considered that two tugs had towed her from her Bangor moorings westward to her new moorings off Plas Newydd on 12th April 1949, and therefore considered that two tugs were sufficient to take her back eastward. Dickie wanted the same tugs (**DONGARTH** and **MINEGARTH**) and one tug master who had taken part in towing her from Glyn Garth to Plas Newydd moorings in 1949. Dickie argued that he arranged hundreds of tows year, and enquired how many tows Hewitt had organized? Dickie had joined Blue Funnel from Tyneside shipbuilder Hawthorn Leslie as assistant superintendent shipwright in 1920. He worked closely with Lawrence Holt. He had no university training and never lost his Geordie accent. Nevertheless he was extremely competent and in 1944 Lawrence Holt appointed him a Manager. An indication of how well he got on with Lawrence Holt is that Blue Funnel was the only shipping company which

had a shipwrights department. Dickie was responsible for all dry-dockings and hull repairs, which in most companies were the domains of the marine and engineer superintendents.

The Swellies is a narrow channel about a mile long between the Tubular and Suspension Bridges. Slack Water, however, occurs one and half hours before High Water. The **CONWAY** needed to pass through the Swellies during the 15 to 20 minutes Slack Water. After Slack Water the West going stream soon reaches 7 to 8 knots. Yachtsmen complain that there is never any wind in the Swellies. On the day of the tow, however, a fresh Northerly breeze added to the difficulties. Pilot Jones knew the intricacies of the Swellies tides thoroughly. The channel is narrow with just sufficient water, particularly over Cheese Rock (where the depth is only 4 feet at Low Water Springs), for the **CONWAY's** 20 feet maximum draught.

From the Conway Committee's Inquiry 8th May 1953.

Captain Hewitt began planning the **CONWAY's** passage through the Swellies in 1952. He made several passages through in the ship's motor launch and also watched the tides from the shore.

Consultations took place with:- Dr. Doodson, Bidston Tidal Observatory.

Captain Rees Thomas, Harbour Master, Caernarfon, who recommended passing under Tubular Bridge at 0925.

Captain F. Durrant, Marine Manager, Rea Towing Company.

Captain Duff, Senior Master, Rea Towing Company.

Tug skippers F.A. Brown forward tug **DONGARTH** and F. Cooper aft tug **MINEGARTH**.

Liverpool pilot James Miller, the Blue Funnel Line Choice Pilot.

The Menai Strait Pilot Richard Jones, with his son, also a pilot, were not at any of these meetings, but only observed the tide from the beach.

Captain Hewitt intended to arrive at the Tubular Bridge at 0920 and planned to make the 9 cables passage at 4 knots.

Communication between the **CONWAY** and tugs was by Walkie-Talkie, but aboard the **CONWAY** they were unable to communicate satisfactorily with the stern tug by Walkie-Talkie, so whistle and simple semaphore signals were arranged.

Aboard the **CONWAY** were Captain Hewitt, in command, with Pilot Jones advising. (He had piloted the ship though the Swellies on her eastbound passage in April 1949).

CONWAY's draught: F 19'06" A 20'00"

Displacement 4,300 tons.

Liverpool pilot Miller was on forecastle head to liaise between the ship and the tugs.

Captain Duff in the stern tug.

Pilot Jones's son aboard the forward tug.

Pilot Jones had asked for 3 tugs. When asked by the Sub-Committee Inquiry into the grounding, what his experience was of ships being towed he replied "negligible".

The **CONWAY's** bow passed under Tubular Bridge at 0923, and Pilot Jones agreed that the ship was early rather than late.

Pilot Jones estimated the wind as NW 2 to 3 later veering NE. No one else agreed that wind had veered NE.

Price's Point Beacon abeam 12 minutes after passing Tubular Bridge.

Abeam Swelly Rock wind veered NE all others say it stayed NW but increasing.

Pilot Jones then suggested to Captain Hewitt that the **CONWAY** should be taken back through the Swellies stern first.

Captain Hewitt decided against this, and witnesses at the inquiry considered that it would have been impossible under the prevailing conditions.

The ship was now stationary and with the pilot's concurrence the stern tug was ordered to let go.

The stern tug could steam at 10 knots, but, at first, when she let go (she slipped the line from her towing hook) she was actually dropping astern of the **CONWAY**.

Captain Duff stated that the tug could not get under the port bow under the conditions so decided to go ahead of the forward tug, pass her line, and tow in line ahead.

The manoeuvre was executed brilliantly. But even with both tugs towing the **CONWAY** made little headway. However with the two tugs towing in tandem **DONGARTH** with taut lines to **MINEGARTH** ahead and the **CONWAY** astern, found her manoeuvrability seriously restricted.

At some time between 1020 and 1030 abreast Platters Rocks the **CONWAY** took a violent sheer to starboard, took charge and went ashore.

The tugs continued pulling at full power for another 10 minutes with no result.

Captain Hewitt stated that the tow line between the tugs broke and a second line was passed.

Captain Duff and the tug skippers disagreed saying that there were two ropes between the tugs, a 6" and 8". The 6" rope parted but at no time were the two tugs unconnected.

The break occurred at the last sheer of the **CONWAY** and in no way contributed to the disaster.

Captain Durrant on the Suspension Bridge, 100 feet above the water, at 0940 estimated the West going tide was between 8 to 10 knots.

Summing up the Inquiry decided it was not possible to use two tugs forward due to the narrowness of the channel.

The Committee considered that Captain Hewitt and the entire team had acted with the highest standards of skill and seamanship. They concluded that the **CONWAY's** grounding was

due to the exceptional condition of a 10 knots tide, when assessments had been made for a tide of 4 knots.

Her loss occurred under Hewitt's command. However, moving a vessel of the **CONWAY's** size and draught through the Swellies was an extremely difficult operation. In fact, she was the largest and deepest draught vessel ever to pass through the Swellies. Her loss occurred despite Hewitt's best efforts in highly arduous circumstances. At no time throughout the rest of his life did he try to shift the responsibility onto anyone else, nor outwardly did he give the slightest impression of having a guilt complex about the loss of the Old Ship. However, to his closest friends and family this was not the case. With his RN administrative experience Hewitt was ideally placed for the changed conditions from a training ship afloat to a shore based establishment. Aboard the Ship the new cadets joining were divided between the port and starboard forecastles. On their second term the small cadets went into the port and starboard mizzentops, where they were likely to remain, unless they grew taller, until their sixth and final term. The others went to starboard foretop. On their third term they moved to port maintop, fourth term port foretop, fifth and final terms they were in starboard maintop. Some third and fourth termers were in the fore guard and hold party. Once ashore in a "stone frigate" the system changed and the number of cadets increased from its 255 wartime complement to 320. The cadets were put into five divisions, forecastle, foretop, manintop, mizzentop and hold. Under the new system a cadet stayed in the top he joined until he left. It was during this initial period that the ship's headmaster and the academics, in consultation with Hewitt, abolished the Conway and Extra Conway Certificates and replaced them with the more acceptable and sensible standard GCE "O" Levels. These were of sufficient academic standard as a preliminary for a 2nd Mate's Certificate, after the cadets finished serving their time at sea.

All the cadets were made honorary members of the Royal Anglesey Yacht Club at Beaumaris and encouraged to participate in the Club's weekly races. The three old gaff rigged sailing dinghies were replaced with five Menai Strait One Design Class, (20 feet clinker built, half decked 20 feet), dinghies and later two Fifes were obtained. (The Fife is a 24 feet Bermuda rig keel boat also used by Oxford and Cambridge Universities).

From June 1956 to June 1958 he was ADC to the Queen. He also held the lifetime appointment as a Younger Brother of Trinity House, and was a liveryman of the Honourable Company of Master Mariners. In 1952 he joined the Royal Anglesey Yacht Club and remained a member until he died. His membership of the Royal Mail Association kept him in touch with his former Royal Mail Line colleagues. He always regarded Royal Mail as the best shipping company in the world, and never forgot how they gave Marjorie a free Mediterranean cruise after having a difficult time at the birth of her son. Through his life governorship he was a keen supporter of the RNLi, whose Director/Secretary, Lt. Cdr. Brian Miles CBE, RD, RNR was one of his old cadets (52-54).

Hewitt was a RNR Advisory Committee member. Normally after reaching eight years seniority RNR captains retire, which meant that Hewitt should have retired in 1955. Their Lordships, however, valued highly Hewitt's contribution, and kept him on the active list until 31st August 1959, by which time he was the most senior captain in the navy list.

First Sea Lord Admiral of the Fleet Lord Louis Mountbatten accompanied the Royal Family aboard **BRITANNIA**, when she visited Holyhead 9th August 1958^[35]. Mountbatten insisted that Hewitt and Marjorie stayed for dinner with him and "the children" as he called Prince Charles and Princess Anne. Despite Hewitt's protests that they had not been invited, the seating plan was re-arranged with Mountbatten's instructions that the Hewitts were to be seated near him.

The Committee of Management had little cash reserve. In 1964 the average number of cadets was 307 cadets and the annual fee £352. (1939 the annual fee was 120).

Her income was £110,590

Expenditure £114,590

Deficit £ 3,970

She struggled on until taken over by Cheshire Education Committee on 1st May 1968. Cheshire Education Committee had no use for a Captain RNR and in July 1968, when Hewitt was sixty four, replaced him with the academic Headmaster, who became the head of the **CONWAY**. But the post war years heralded tremendous changes throughout the world, and it was inevitable that some change effected the **CONWAY** especially after the mid-1950s. For instance, as the number of ships diminished fewer officers were required, with a correspondingly smaller number of trainees needed. Over the one hundred years since her founding the **CONWAY** had fulfilled her rôle of serving Britain's merchant fleet remarkably well. Not only shipping but many other industries and establishments had been hit by industry's progress and society's change. Consequently the **CONWAY's** demise was more of a vanishing need rather than the Management Committee's failure. Other factors were that:-

The **CONWAY** was too bound in tradition to adapt to modern training methods. For example, the duty cadet captain was recording the state of the sea, despite the fact that he could not see the Menai Strait!

Then the shipping companies were vying with each other to provide better training facilities and systems.

After two years training aboard the **CONWAY** cadets received one year sea time remission. After one year at Southampton the cadets received nine months sea time remission. Parents hard pressed to find school fees, which were the same as a Public School, would obviously consider Southampton to be better value.

In her closing years only about 20% of the cadets went to sea, and the "stone frigate" finally closed in the summer of 1974 almost one hundred and fifteen years from her opening on Monday 1st August 1859. About three thousand cadets passed through the **CONWAY** while Hewitt was Captain. Needless to say with the responsibility for the care of three hundred 'teenagers it was essential to be a strict disciplinarian. However, he was closer to the cadets than his predecessors. New Chums were invited to a Sunday afternoon tea, and were shown the Japanese sword. As they completed their two years aboard they were again invited for a Sunday tea, with those who had aspired to become cadet captains being invited to dinner. It was an indication of his understanding of human relations, just as on his "de-mob" Mountbatten gave him a silver cigarette box as an appreciation of his service in Delhi. Clearly he was a gifted communicator whether dealing with the top brass or the lower deck. He loved conversation, and besides being a great talker he was equally a good listener.

On his retirement the Blue Funnel Line gave Hewitt and Marjorie a voyage to the Far East. Possibly it was because of the strong Blue Funnel connections with the **CONWAY**, that in 1969 the Ocean Steam Ship Company granted him an ex gratia pension^[36]. In 1986 Ocean bought a pension for all its ex gratia pensioners in the Ocean Nestor Pension Scheme. It is excellent pension and in 1989 all pensioners over seventy received a generous 37% pension increase. In retirement Hewitt became a part time coastguard at Penmon at the eastern end of the Menai Strait, and was High Sheriff of Anglesey in 1971. From 1974 to 1994 he was Chairman of the HMS **CONWAY** Centenary Appeal Fund.

In July 1990 the Conway Club in Vancouver invited him over on an all expenses paid trip for his eighty sixth birthday. At the restaurant where the Club took him for his birthday dinner was one spare seat. When a sledge with a teepee on was hauled in the Club explained that it was a Canadian custom. Hidden inside the teepee was his daughter, Ann, who the Club had

flown in from bustling Calgary, Canada's rodeo capital. Those present recall that the reunion between father and daughter was quite emotional. Among the guests at a garden party hosted by Mrs. Edna Cook was a Mrs. Wells who he had not seen since his Royal Mail days. He was also taken yachting in Vancouver Sound, but he found his first trip in a helicopter more exciting.

Throughout the year, summer and winter, he could be seen tending his garden at "Ty Gwyn" his Penmon home, and taking a break scanning the Menai Strait through a pair of powerful Japanese binoculars mounted on a tripod which he had acquired while in Singapore. When aboard the **CONWAY** and later at Plas Newydd he always told the cadets that the binoculars were powerful enough to look across the Strait to Port Dinorwic and see if any of them were smoking. He reckoned that his formula for a successful retirement was the "3Gs":-

Gardening, which he was doing until the day of his accident.

Gin. Any callers, and there were many of his old cadets, and the Gordon's appeared with the remark, "thank goodness you've come. I cannot be a secret drinker".

Gaspers. He was a heavy smoker.

The ladies at the local bridge club insisted on rigidly imposing a no smoking rule. So when he was dummy he would go outside for a smoke.

One evening he fell asleep while reading a book downstairs. Apparently he went to bed unaware that he had dropped his cigarette on his settee. It seems he awoke in the night and either saw light or smoke from the fire. He went downstairs and extinguished the fire with a bucket of water. Exhausted he returned upstairs and collapsed due to having inhaled carbon monoxide. The next morning the postman found the kitchen filled with smoke and raised the alarm. Hewitt was rushed to Bangor Hospital, and from there he was taken to Whiston Hospital, Liverpool, which specializes in burns. Although suffering from burns he still managed a joke. "Anyone got a fag?" he asked before being taken off in the ambulance. He hung on for several days before his final crossing of the bar on 13th December 1995. Marjorie, who had given him steadfast support during his captaincy of the ship pre-deceased him aged eighty in 1984. After her death he taught himself to cook and bake cakes. He also took over her duties at Penmon Church. One was arranging the flowers below the lectern. He knew nothing about flower arranging, but with his maritime ingenuity, instituted his own flower rotation system. When a flower died he extracted the stem and replaced it with a fresh one. He attended the church regularly, and at the same time ensured that Marjorie's grave was kept "shipshape and Bristol fashion". His son Michael, an Old Gordonstoun Hand and former lieutenant commander RN, with daughters Ann and Carol survive him.

Nearly, four hundred people attended St. Mary's Parish Church, Beaumaris at 1100 hours 11th May 1996, where former RN chaplain Gwyndaf Hughes conducted a Memorial Service for Captain Hewitt's Memorial Service. Two Royal Marine bandsmen, Muckell[37] and Worrall, from the Royal Naval College, Dartmouth, attended the service and sounded the last post. In the congregation were the Marquis and Marchioness of Anglesey, retired BP Tankers Chief Executive G.A.B. (Gabby) King[38] CBE, one of QE 2's captains, (another of his old cadets), and over 200 Old Conways. Captain D.T. Smith RN, who was Chief Cadet Captain and Gold Medalist in the summer term 1944, represented Trinity House. He also gave the eulogy. Perhaps one of the greatest tributes were the numerous comments: "I wish he had been captain when I was aboard".

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[1] Double Extra Certificates appear in the **CONWAY REGISTER OF CADETS** until about 1930, but, so far the writer has been unable to find more information. However, some Old Conways think that an extra could have been awarded for academic achievement and a second extra for conduct.

[2] From Captain's Hewitt's "REFLECTIONS" written in 1980 for The Conway Club in Vancouver.

[3] The Shire Line, (also known as Jenkins's Shire Line) with the Glen Line became a wholly owned subsidiary of Sir Owen Philipps's Royal Mail Steam Packet Company in 1911. 1923 Sir Owen was created Baron Kylsant. His shipping empire crashed in 1930, and Alfred Holt & Company were able to buy the Glen and Shire Lines.

[4] If war was declared the government anticipated that Hitler would not hesitate to use poison gas. Therefore every man woman and child in Britain was supplied with a gas mask. During the early years of the war every off-duty serviceman and service woman in uniform had to carry their gas mask.

[5] He might have earned this name from a cargo incident. One of his contemporaries was known as "Bungalow" Cornick. He is supposed to have over-carried a bungalow from Rio to Santos

[6] Although Hewitt says Scotland Yard it was more likely the Home Office, who issued the certificate.

[7] Neither the Admiralty of shipping companies published their manuals as an individual's personal work. However, it is a different matter when individuals write and publish their own work.

[8] He was now thirty five and it is a remainder of how slow promotion was after the Kylsant crash and 1930s slump. At that time a Royal Mail Line chief officer earned £25 a month. An AB earned £9-10s-0d a month.

[9] The first outward bound Atlantic convoys sailed from the Channel and Liverpool on 7th September 1939. The first homeward bound Atlantic convoy sailed from Halifax on 16th September 1939.

[10] On 10th September 1940, because of bombing, E-boats and mines the Port of London was more or less closed for several years for deep sea vessels.

[11]. From 1939-1946 the Admiralty administered Dover Harbour.

[12] Flower Class sloops, (they were later upgraded to corvettes) were ordered before the outbreak of war and intended originally for coastal work. By the end of 1940 they found to be poor escorts in the North Atlantic winter as they rolled excessively, manoeuvred badly and with their overcrowded mess-decks were extremely uncomfortable. Although their design speed was 16½ knots they made only 15 knots and were too slow to keep pace with a U-boat steaming on the surface.

[13] She sailed from Trincomalee on 19th December 1941, arrived Cape Town 28th December 1941, sailed 29th December, arrived and sailed Trinidad 8th January 1942 and arrived New York 12th January 1942.

[14] June 1943 George VI went by air for a two weeks tour of North Africa. Fog at Gibraltar diverted his aircraft to Algiers. Shortly after his arrival at Tripoli's Castel Benito airport the King conferred upon General Montgomery the accolade of knighthood, which Montgomery had earned at El Alamein. During his four day visit the King stayed at Montgomery's HQ west of Tripoli. At his

own insistence the King sailed from Tripoli and visited Malta aboard the cruiser AURORA. She was escorted by four destroyers. This was before Operation HUSKY and Sicily was still occupied by the Axis. Air raids on Malta continued until October 1944.

[15] Operation HUSKY needed 2,311 transports and 279 warships. A total of 116,000 British troops and 66,000 American troops were landed in Sicily.

[16] Italy's entry into the war 10th June 1940 closed the Mediterranean to Allied shipping. However, special convoys both from Gibraltar and Alexandria kept Malta supplies. A SEA BREEZE's article June 1949 stated that Hewitt was the Senior Officer of the Escort on the first convoy from Alexandria to Gibraltar (1,800 miles approximately 8½ days steaming for the convoy) after the Mediterranean re-opened. The writer has been unable to confirm this, but considers that it might have been MKS 21.

[17] **EMPIRE HAVEN** had been dispatched optimistically from Takoradi on 15th September 1942 to pick-up survivors from the Cunard White Star **LACONIA** (16,695 grt) 848 miles South West of the port. **LACONIA** was torpedoed by U-156 (Lieutenant Commander Werner Hartenstein) at 2100 GMT 12th September 1942 in 05 05'S 11 38'W with 1,793 Italian prisoners of war aboard. Of the 2,609 people aboard nearly 2,000 perished. Approximately 450 Italians survived.

[18] When the Royal Mail Line ship was scrapped Hewitt was able to six of her saloon chairs for 7s-6d (38p) each, which he used in his dining room. His son Michael recalls that the blankets he bought from the ship were monogrammed "Royal Mail Steam Packet Company".

[19] **WHIMBREL** was sold to Egypt in 1949. In 1997 she is lying in Alexandria.

[20] **PEVENSEY CASTLE** was one of the Commodore W.E. Warwick's (**CONWAY** cadet 1926-28) last two commands before being "demobbed" and returning to Cunard. He was the only Master to command the **QUEEN MARY**, **QUEEN ELIZABETH** and **QE2**. He stood by the **QE2** during her building and took command of her on her maiden voyage and remained in her until his retirement.

[21]. Compiled from Captain Donald Isaac Donald's (**CROMARTY's** Master) "Examination On Oath" to the Receiver of Wrecks A.J. Mullins, Officer of Customs and Excise, Falmouth, 1st February 1945.

18th January 1945 **CROMARTY** sailed in ballast from Hull at noon with a complement of forty in convoy bound for Halifax.

21st January 1945 anchored off Southend at 1445.

22nd January 1945 left Southend at 2200.

23rd January 1945 while proceeding through the Downs, near Sandhead buoy in 51° 13½'N 01° 02'E (1¼' East of Deal), at 0324 she was in collision, with the British motor tanker TROCAS. **CROMARTY** anchored at 0455 awaiting orders. Captain Donaldson considered that some temporary repairs needed.

26th January 1945 she received orders to proceed to Barry Roads and left in convoy at 2345.

28th January 1945 with wind N-4 and a moderate sea she was fourth ship in starboard column when at 1345 the 2nd officer, who was on watch, saw smoke coming from pantry skylights. He sent the Radio Officer to investigate. He found the pantry full of smoke and the 3rd officer and Chief Engineer trying to extinguish the fire which had broken out in the pantry.

Captain Donaldson's quarters were above the pantry. He smelt the smoke, went immediately to the bridge, put the engine on standby, sounded the fire alarm, took the ship out of the convoy and to stop the flames spreading stopped her. Meanwhile the Chief Officer brought two hoses into use.

The captain ordered a roll-call to be made, and the accommodation in the vicinity of the fire was searched by the Chief Engineer. Assistant Engineer Bernard James Long, whose cabin was in the port alleyway, was missing.

As the boat deck was in danger from the fire the Chief Officer ordered a lifeboat on the port side to be lowered into the water.

PEVENSEY CASTLE came alongside and enquired if assistance was needed. Captain Donaldson replied yes. **PEVENSEY CASTLE** put six fire hoses with fire-fighting parties aboard **CROMARTY**. Before she came alongside one lifeboat with a skeleton crew, in charge of the Second Officer, was launched. By about 1630 the fire was under control and **PEVENSEY CASTLE's** assistance no longer needed. **CROMARTY** got under way towing the lifeboats, and proceeded slowly, to prevent risk of fanning the flames towards Falmouth, which she reached at 2050.

29th January 1945 small outbreaks of fire continued to occur and it was 0100 that after an inspection Captain Donaldson was satisfied that the fire was completely extinguished. The whole midship accommodation, was gutted and part of the bridge and fittings, lifeboats and gear damaged.

[22] This is probably the emergency hand steering gear on the poop.

[23]. It was thought that **CROMARTY's** crew had abandoned ship, and **PEVENSEY CASTLE** claimed salvage money. No salvage agreement had been signed, although salvage is not dependent upon an agreement or a ship being abandoned. If abandoned though it may affect the award. But **CROMARTY's** master alleged that he had not abandoned ship. However, Coastal

Command is supposed to have taken photographs that proved the entire crew were in the lifeboats. The First Lieutenant's father was Writer to the Signet (Scottish Law Society) and with his expert knowledge of law was able to sort the claim out. Doubtless, the Admiralty oversaw the claim as they would have had the "lion's share".

On 4th June 1945 Commander-in-Chief, Plymouth, after perusing Captain Donald's Examination on Oath concluded:-

"From this it is evident that there was no premature abandonment and that the ship's crew took energetic measures to fight the fire. No doubt the full facts of the case as shown in the deposition were not known to the Senior Officer 30th Escort Group when he made his report.

[24] **CROMARTY** sailed from Falmouth on 8th February 1945 and arrived at Blyth 12th February 1945. She was under-going repairs in Blyth until 2nd June 1945, when she sailed for New York arriving on 18th June 1945.

[25] All the MN captains and some of their crews were invited ashore on the historic occasion of the Surrender Ceremony. Crew were given shore leave and enjoyed the novelty of seeing Japanese prisoners being put to work.

[26] Sir John Nicholson served briefly as a captain with the Cheshire Regiment from 1939-1940, and was Mentioned in Dispatches. 1941 he was employed by the Ministry of Shipping and later was the Ministry of War Transport representative in Delhi. He had been appointed to the Conway Committee of Management in 1941, when aged only thirty, and promoted from one of Alfred Holt's assistant managers to full manager in 1944.

[27] Mountbatten accepted the post of Viceroy on 11th February 1947 and arrived in Delhi on 22nd March 1947.

[28] **ARBITER** was one of 22 merchant ship hulls constructed with a wooden flight deck. She was built at Tacoma in 1943, 496' overall, flight deck breath 105', able to carry 22 operational aircraft and had a speed of 18½ knots. She was not being used operationally, but to carry aircraft, whose wings were folded, across the Atlantic. As her air crew accommodation was not being used the Admiralty made it available for bringing home naval families who had been evacuated. She was under Lease Lend from the US to the Admiralty.

[29] At the time a liner company, such as Cunard White Star, paid a chief officer aboard one of its cargo ships £45 a month or £540 a year. (An AB earned £24 a month). The **CONWAY's** academic staff were paid in accordance with the Burnham Scale. The officers' pay, however, depended on the MMSA. Its General Secretary, Alfred Wilson, had been a sergeant major during the Great War, and it is said remained one for the rest of his life. According to his successor he made the MMSA staff sign a letter of allegiance to him. Furthermore, Wilson was not over generous with what he paid the **CONWAY's** officers. Certainly Goddard had not fared too well on his retirement. However, Goddard was able to supplement his pension by getting a job as a marine paint "rep" with Berger Paints.

[30] Roughly the same salary as the master of a tramp steamer.

[31] During the Luftwaffe blitz on Merseyside in March 1941 several incendiaries fell aboard the **CONWAY**, which were promptly extinguished. Two parachute mines fell into the river near her. The Smith's of Cardiff tramp TACOMA CITY (4,738 grt) was sunk by one on 13th March 1941. The **CONWAY** rescued forty three survivors from her.

[32] From Captain Hewitt's "Reflections" written in 1980 for the Conway Club in Vancouver.

[33] The **CRESCENT** (1,710 tons displacement) was built at Clydebank and commissioned 20th July 1944. She was handed over to the RCN in 1945.

[34] Now Captain G.H. Hayes, DSC, OMM, CD, RCN, Rtd..

[35] This was Prince Charles's first visit to Wales and the party landed at MacKenzie Pier. A monument has been erected on the pier commemorating the visit.

[36] In a letter to the Ocean Steam Ship Company in July 1969 Hewitt stated that his main pension would be coming from the Merchant Navy Officers's Pension Fund.

[37] By an odd coincidence Tony Muckell had joined the "stone frigate" **INDEFATABLE** in 1983, where he learnt to play the bugle. When the **CONWAY** closed in 1974 all the band instruments were given to **INDEFATABLE**, so it seems likely that he learnt his trade with **CONWAY** instruments.

[38] In 1953 George King was a British Tankers chief officer. He was seconded to the **CONWAY** on a one year appointment, and was aboard, when the Ship went ashore.

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In compiling Captain Hewitt's story information has been gathered from:-

Mrs. Carol Woolfrey (daughter), amongst many other things kindly supplied copies of her Father's discharge book, the MINNIE DE LARRINGA and CROMARTY incidents and his "REFLECTIONS" written in 1980 for the Vancouver Conway Club.

Lt. Cdr. Michael Hewitt RN (son), who supplied details of his Father's RNR service, and extracts from his Father's notes.

Former Conway Committee Honorary Secretary Leslie Harrison, Dr. G. Hümmelchen, Professor Dr. J. Rohwer.

David Fletcher Rogers (43-45) whose enthusiasm for anything **CONWAY** is

phenomenal.

Norman Hutchinson (59-61) a near neighbour and frequent caller.

Richard Hutson (34-35 Chief Cadet Captain and Gold Medalist) former Principal of Training Ocean Fleets.

Capt. G.D. Pari-Huws (44-45) Former Chief Marine Superintendent Elder Dempster Lines and Ocean Fleets Director.

The Royal Mail Association.

John Southwood (55-57) for numerous anecdotes, and camcorder video made by Ian Hopkinson (54-56) with himself, Captain Hewitt and Tony Sessions (56-57) on 25th September 1993. With the passage of half a century it is inevitable that some inaccuracies have crept into the reminiscences.

Captain Jim Thompson (39-41) a former President of the Conway Club and Newsletter Editor, who perused micro film of "The Cadet".

"The Blue Funnel Legend" by Malcolm Falkus.

"Chronology of the War at Sea 1939-1945" by J. Rohwer.

"George VI" by Sarah Bradford.

Keesing's Archives.

"The Merchant Navy and the Demands of War" (HMSO) by C.B.A. Abigail.

"The War at Sea 1939-1945" (HMSO) by Capt. S.W. Roskill.

Daily Post (Liverpool) Library, Dover Museum, The Guildhall Library, Jane's Fighting Ships, Lloyd's Index, Lloyd's War Losses Vol. 2, MMSA Archives, Sea Breezes June 1949.

Captain Brian McManus. (**HMS CONWAY** cadet January 1942-March 1944).

Ellwood,

St. Asaph Avenue,

Kinmel Bay,

Rhyl, LL18 5HA.

22nd September 1997. (Additions 21st April 2000)