

## TABLE TALK / TO THE POINT :

JANUARY 2012

Welcome to 2012, a year of significant anniversaries – the bicentenary of the war between Britain and the United States; of Napoleon's retreat from Moscow and of the centenary of the completion and loss of the RMS TITANIC to mention but a couple. Here's hoping that it will be a year on which our members will look back with pleasure.

### *Heaven is Where:-*

*The Police are British,  
The Chefs are French  
The Mechanics are German,  
The Lovers are Italian  
and  
It's all organized by the Swiss.*

### *Hell is Where:-*

*The Police are German,  
The Chefs are British,  
The Mechanics are French,  
The Lovers are Swiss  
and  
It's all organized by the Italians.*

**THE RUSSIAN CONVOYS :** If given the opportunity to choose between the Malta convoys and the convoys to North Russia in World War Two I believe Malta would be my choice where your chances of survival are much better in the relatively warmer waters of the Mediterranean whereas in the icy waters of the Bering Sea or the White Sea you have two minutes in the water before hyperthermia sets in and kills you. After 72 hours in an open life boat frost bite and gangrene could cost you feet, hands and possibly legs if you survived. I always recall the story of how a lifeboat in full sail was sighted sailing through icy seas with the helmsman gazing off to the horizon but when the rescue craft came alongside it was seen that all the occupants were frozen solid. The lifeboat was allowed to sail on to Valhalla.

Russia was fighting for its life with the battle of Stalingrad and the siege of Leningrad needing all the supplies they could get.

78 convoys sailed to Northern Russia usually commencing this most dangerous run from Iceland up to Murmansk and Archangel and after the first few convoys arrived successfully the Germans realized that these convoys must be stopped at all cost.

The Luftwaffe was flying out of airfields in Finland and Norway while the Kriegsmarine, led by the Battleship Tirpitz, lay in Norwegian fjords together with many U boats ready to harass the convoys as soon as they were sighted.

Winter was the best time for the convoys to travel as there were long periods of darkness but the weather was atrocious and the convoys had to travel further south to keep away from the ice shelf but that brought them closer to the Norwegian coast and its airfields.

In the summer months the convoys could sail further north as the ice shelf receded but it was permanently daylight perfect for U-Boats, aircraft and the surface fleet.

Between August 1941 until May 1945, 78 convoys sailed to North Russia carrying four million tons of supplies for the Russian war effort. 85 cargo ships were sunk and the escorts lost 2 cruisers, 6 destroyers and 8 other vessels. By comparison the Germans lost 30 U-boats, 3 destroyers and a battleship plus quite a number of other vessels with the Luftwaffe also losing many aircraft. Several sea battles were fought in these northern waters.

Convoy designations varied from year to year and between September 1941 and September 1942 it was PQ to Russia and QP back to a loading port. Four million tons of cargo was 23% of cargo delivered to Russia. 27% of cargo was delivered via the Persian Gulf and 50% through Far Eastern Russia.

Convoy PQ 17 was a disaster in which the British Admiralty had the responsibility. There were 38 ships in the convoy that left Iceland of which only 9 returned to Britain. 23 were sunk on the way to Russia and 4 on the way back, 2 had returned to Iceland. On American Independence day, July 4<sup>th</sup> 1942, the British Admiralty using poor intelligence, ordered the escort to abandon the convoy as the battleship Tirpitz had left the Norwegian fjords and was heading for the convoy. The convoy was ordered to scatter which was fatal and 23 cargo ships were lost. These orders proved to be a tragic mistake but it took 15 years to learn that it was the First Sea Lord, Admiral Sir Dudley Pound who had given these orders. He had taken power from his fleet commanders who should have made any decisions necessary having been given all intelligence available. The Americans were very angry about the orders given as were the British escort and because of this disaster Winston Churchill cancelled convoy PQ 18.

The few remaining of survivors of the Russian convoys march in the Remembrance Day Parade in London wearing white berets. – *Our anonymous correspondent.*

*The noted writer Godfrey Winn sailed with Convoy Q 17 as a War Correspondent and then, at the age of 36, joined the Royal Navy as an ordinary seaman and underwent basic training at HMS GANGES.*

**DICK JENKINS :** Thanks to our Anonymous Correspondent Dick's Obituary was published last month in the Journal of the IMarEst, of which he was a member for many years.

*A rather fat girl served Jock in McDonald's at lunch time.*

*She said "Sorry about the wait."*

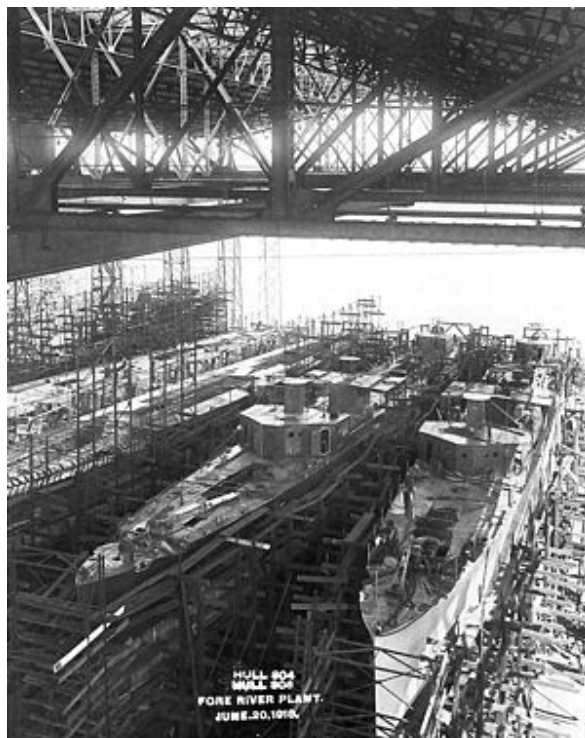
*Jock said "Don't worry dear you're bound to lose it eventually."*

**KILROY WAS HERE :** Anyone around in the thirties and forties knew of Kilroy. We didn't know why but we had lapel pins with his nose hanging over the label and the top of his face above his nose with his hands hanging over the label too. I believe it was orange

coloured. No one knew why he was so well known but we all joined in. Kind of a war story, now we know.

In 1946 the American Transit Association, through its radio program, "Speak to America," sponsored a nationwide contest to find the REAL Kilroy, offering a prize of a real trolley car to the person who could prove himself to be the genuine article. Almost 40 men stepped forward to make that claim, but only John J. Kilroy from Halifax, Massachusetts, had evidence of his identity.

Kilroy was a 46-year old shipyard worker during the war who worked as a welding inspector at the Fore River Shipyard in Quincy. His job was to go around and check on the length and number of welds produced and to put a check mark in semi-waxed lumber chalk and add the words KILROY WAS HERE in king-sized letters next to the check. Eventually he added the sketch of the chap with the long nose peering over the fence and that became part of the Kilroy message.



DESTROYERS UNDER CONSTRUCTION AT FORE RIVER DURING WORLD WAR II.

Ordinarily the chalk marks would have been covered up with paint. With war on, however, ships were leaving the Quincy Yard so fast that there wasn't time to paint them thoroughly. As a result, Kilroy's inspection "trademark" was seen by thousands of servicemen who boarded the ships the yard produced. His message apparently rang a bell with the servicemen, because they picked it up and spread it all over Europe and the South Pacific. Before war's end, "Kilroy" had been here, there, and everywhere on the long hauls to Berlin and Tokyo.

To the troops outbound in those ships, however, he was a complete mystery; all they knew for sure was that some jerk named Kilroy had "been there first." As a joke, U.S. servicemen began placing the graffiti wherever they landed, claiming it was already there when they arrived.

Kilroy became the U.S. super-GI who had always "already been" wherever GIs went. It became a challenge to place the logo in the most unlikely places imaginable (it is said to be atop Mt. Everest, the Statue of Liberty, and on the underside of the Arc de Triomphe, and even scrawled in the dust on the moon).

As the war went on, the legend grew. Underwater demolition teams routinely sneaked ashore Japanese-held islands in the Pacific to map the terrain for coming invasions by U.S. troops (and thus, presumably, were the first GI's there). On one occasion, however, they reported seeing enemy troops painting over the Kilroy logo. In 1945, an outhouse was built for the exclusive use of Roosevelt, Stalin, and Churchill at the Potsdam conference. Its first occupant was Stalin, who emerged and asked his aide (in Russian), "Who is Kilroy?"

To help prove his authenticity in 1946, John Kilroy brought along officials from the shipyard and some of the welders. He won the trolley car, which he gave to his nine children as a Christmas gift and set it up as a playhouse in the Kilroy front yard in Halifax, Massachusetts.

If you check the WWII memorial in Washington DC, you will see Kilroy peeking over a wall.



“KILROY” ON THE WORLD WAR II MEMORIAL IN WASHINGTON DC.

*Jock came out of a shop with a meat and potato pie, large chips, mushy peas & a jumbo sausage.*

*A poor homeless man sat there and said “I’ve not eaten for two days.”*

*Jock told him “I wish I had your will power.”*

**A BLAST FROM THE PAST :** Two hundred years ago John Wood & Co. of Port Glasgow constructed a wooden paddle vessel to the order of Henry Bell of Glasgow. The thirty ton vessel was propelled by a 3 ihp steam engine and was named COMET, after a comet which was visible in the sky over Scotland for several months during 1811 and 1812.

Bell operated round trips three times per week from Glasgow calling at Helensburgh and Greenock to provide the first regular steamboat service in Britain.

In 1819 the COMET was lengthened and fitted with a new engine for a service from Oban to Fort William via the Crinan Canal, operating on this route until she was wrecked near Oban on 13 December 1820.



A replica of the COMET was built at Port Glasgow in 1962. This vessel now has a permanent shore berth at Port Glasgow, close to the shipyard where her predecessor was built in 1812.

### *ODE TO THE "TOT."*

*There once was a time in H.M.Ships,  
When the magic hour had come.  
The leading hands of every mess  
Prepared to collect the rum.*

*The smell of Jamaican filled the air  
As the ritual began  
A daily tot of Nelson's Blood  
Was a favourite to every man.*

*When the Rum Bosun stood, his measure poised  
To serve every man his tot.  
Two fingers always in the 'cup '  
Making sure that the 'Queen 'got her lot.'*

*The 'ticker off' was there, of course  
His pencil at the ready,  
With a sipper given from each man's tot  
His hand was no longer steady.*

*The rum rat sat, his eyes aglow  
His whiskers twitching well  
He liked his rum so much it seems  
He could get drunk on the smell.*

*Sometimes the tots were passed around  
As each man paid his debts  
Favour, rubber, game of crib  
Could cost a couple of wets.*

*Then came the time to sup the 'Queens'  
"God Bless Her" was the toast  
A watchful eye, as each man supped.  
So the Rum Bosun got the most.*

*Once the rum had been consumed  
And nothing left to pour;  
The dits began, as the 'Grog' took charge,  
Of favourite runs ashore.*

*A feed, a fight, a couple of pints  
Was part of a run ashore.  
A game of darts was in there too  
Then all night with a Pompey \*\*\*\*\*..*

*No longer though, does the scent of rum  
Pervade her Majesty's boats.  
No more to sup Lord Nelson's Blood  
And give the Queen her toasts.*

*So to all who drank Lord Nelson's Blood  
And heard the Klaxon's blast  
May old shipmates meet and share a wet  
Spinning dits of the good times passed.*

*A toast then to Horatio  
And another to the Queen.  
And may we all, wherever we are  
Remember where we've been!*