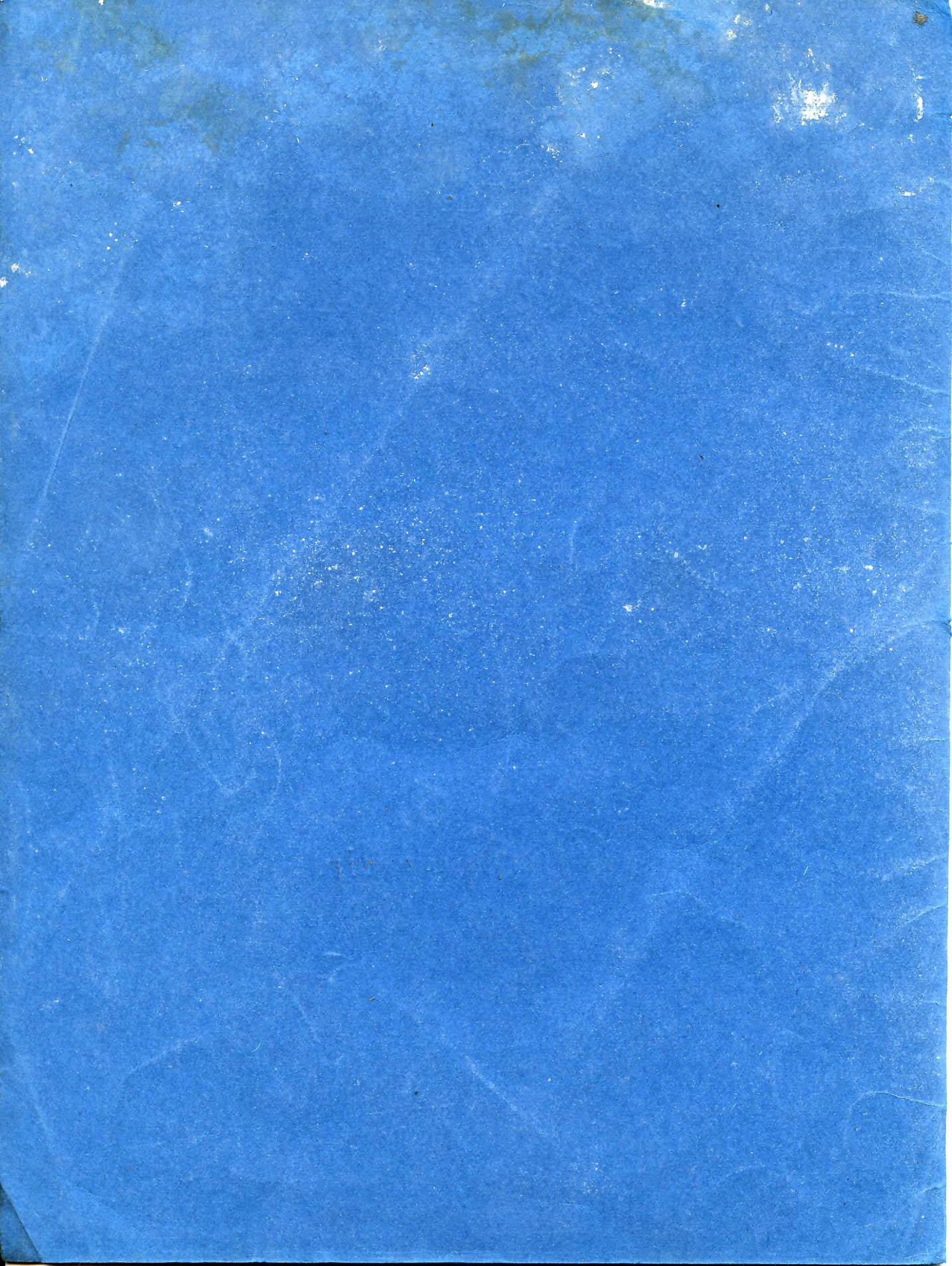
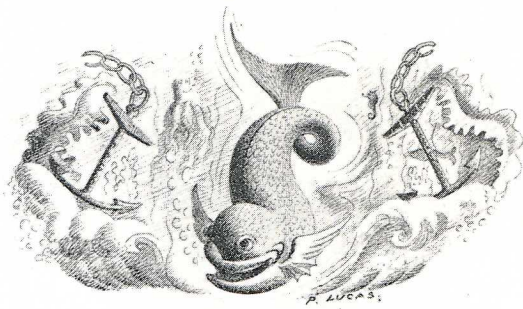


The
Royal Navy at Poole
1940-1945

A Souvenir.





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It was fun while it lasted.

1940 - 1945

DESPITE its near 70,000 population and a 99-miles high-water-mark, Poole is not so widely known as its proud inhabitants would wish. It is not a Portsmouth, a Plymouth or even a Wilhelms-haven, but in the course of seven centuries of recorded history its name has, from time to time, been writ large in the country's maritime records.

Legend has it that King Alfred's ships were built upon its shores. If so, then it is the birthplace of the Royal Navy. Certainly it contributed men and ships to many wars with France, and took no small part in the fight against the Spanish Armada.

In the first World War it became an important mine-sweeping base, accommodating some 150 North Sea trawlers. Small wonder, then, that when the war against Nazism began, the Admiralty once again looked upon strategically well placed Poole as a base for its little ships.

Listen, then, to the story of the Poole Navy, the officers, ratings and W.R.N.S. of which claim to have achieved as much as those in any British port and to have far outstripped most.

From Dunkirk to D-Day when pressure of work was so great that at times it was more a case of staving off disaster than exercising effective control. Suffice to say control was exercised and disaster averted during the greatest amphibious operation of all time.

The storm burst with the fall of France. Improvised arrangements had to be made. The harbour defended or denied to the enemy should defence fail. Its facilities made available for returning personnel from the Expeditionary Force and refugees from France and Belgium.

The Admiralty sent two seamen with local knowledge. Captain Casey, C.B.E., D.S.O., D.S.C., R.D., R.N.R., and Lt.-Commander Vandy, R.N.R., from Portland, to do their best. Their only resource was the authority of the Royal Navy. With one eye on Heath Robinson and the other on Admiralty specifications they set to work. Wire rope, six miles of it, was requisitioned, if such a word can be applied to something that was freely given. A boom was improvised. Torpedo war heads set in concrete were used for mines with firing circuits improvised by local electricians.

Obstacles to stop aircraft landing on the water and tank barriers were strung along the shore. All the time an avalanche of coasters of all Nationalities flooded the port, some carrying refugees, some seeking refuge themselves. Suspicion everywhere, for with men of many nations none knew who was to be trusted. A battery of 6-inch guns was installed on Brownsea Island and later handed over to the Army. War came very near when two Dutch coasters, making their accustomed passage through the harbour under the charge of Poole pilots, were sunk in the Swash Channel by magnetic mines.

Poole was fortunate in avoiding destruction by enemy aircraft. Nevertheless, 456 H.E. and 10,000 incendiary bombs fell in the area of the port. A decoy was established on Brownsea and had an outstanding success on Whit Sunday, 1942, when it took the full brunt of a sharp raid on Poole. It saved the town, something for which the citizens of Poole were extremely grateful. In June, 1942, the yacht Sona, accommodation ship of the base, was sunk by a delayed action bomb. Although most of N.O.I/c's staff were aboard none were injured. After this the base personnel were dispersed in lodgings in the town until the base was closed down.

In 1942, tip and run raiders menaced shipping, and one of the examination vessels was brought into port in a sinking condition. The victualling store on the quay was destroyed, fortunately the staff had left at the time. The decline in enemy activity later that year, heralded a quiet period, but in the late summer the first flotilla of landing craft arrived to exercise with Commandos.

Strange reports circulated. Work at Ham Common, a new hard. Work at Ridge, slipways at Bolsons and the Dorset Yacht Co., new moorings trots. Thames barges arrived with their sterns cut away for beach landings, a few L.C.T.S. They were followed by every known form of landing craft.

The Stars and Stripes appeared. Soon they equalled the White Ensigns. The harbour was never still.

Ships berthed three and four and even seven abreast in the dock. The passage between the quays resembled the eye of a needle, but it was negotiated by young officers experiencing their first command, sometimes their first spell on the bridge.

Amidst all this activity the merchant trade of the port carried on without interruption even if some times at inconvenience.

Exercise followed exercise. Curious names were heard. Exercise "Pirate." Exercise "Pluto." Finally, exercise "OVERLORD." None knew if it were rumour or fact, but there was something harder behind the orders now. Insistence and drive. Disregard for all normal ideas. Every berth, every buoy in the harbour was occupied, some times triple-occupied. Work was driven harder and faster every day.

June the 4th, 1944. Part of the great fleet sailed. Then the gale delay, alterations, rapid improvisation, difficulties overcome by common sense and initiative. Weather still very bad. The fleet sailed in spite of everything, 320 vessels of all sizes, for the most part in the hands of young and inexperienced officers and crews.

Only one failed to cross the bar at the appointed time. Only one young seaman was absent from his post.

It was the real thing, but no practice had ever run so smoothly. A short lull, then, once more super-heated pressure as supplies poured across the Channel. Craft to repair and refit. New construction to take the place of casualties. Mistakes there were in plenty. But not once during that period did anything occur which could have been described as a blunder. Nothing which could have impeded for an instant the success of the Armies on the other side.

Finally, VE-Day. Free beer, free gangway, free for all. A warm pleasant day, good natured jollification everywhere.

The Poole Navy had done its duty.



Commander Hastings, O.B.E., R.N., the Naval Officer-in-Charge of the base discusses some question of Naval procedure with a seaman, while Lieutenant Fox, R.N.V.R., the executive Officer of the base looks bored. Commander Hastings, usually referred to as the "old man," had a fierce bark as becomes a Naval Officer tempered by a kind heart which endeared him to all.



P.O. Calver, R.P.O. of the base. He never said an unkind word about anyone or to anyone and never had any nonsense either. He supervised the accommodation of many thousands of men with efficiency and tact and was universally popular. The X.O. in the centre gives instructions for painting ship to the seaman appearing round the corner.



A couple of "gash, two and a balfers having a loaf on the Quay." While matlots join their ship. Lieut.-Commander Kenneth Ivens, R.N.V.R., usually known as "Shocker," and Lieut.-Commander Norman Dartnell, R.N.V.R., Assistant Naval Officer in Charge.



Three unidentified base officers. The Wren Officer in the background bears a resemblance to 2nd Officer Ridout, W.R.N.S., the third and last secretary of the base. The officer on the right wears the same lace as Commissioned-gunner Hawes and the officer in the middle might be the Berthing Master.

