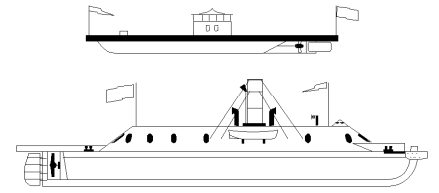


# Hampton Roads Ship Model Society

# Logbook



No. 197

NOVEMBER, 2002

## MINUTES



HRSMS Monthly Meeting  
October 4, 2002  
Host, Greg Harrington

The meeting was called to order by the skipper at 2000 hours.

There were no corrections to the minutes as published.

A Pursers report was given.

Old Business: It was decided to discuss the 2005 NRG Conference later in the meeting. Joe McCleary stated that he received a far more interesting report of Alan and Jane Frazer's trip to Russia from Jane than we received from Alan at the last meeting. She is more refined in her observations and uses fitting adjectives to describe them. Bob Comet will give the presentation at the November meeting, Joe McCleary in December and Jack Bobbitt will give the presentation at the January meeting.

New Business: None

Show & Tell: Dave Baker, the book U.S. Amphibious Ships and Craft, Greg Harrington, the book Inshore Boats of Norway and John Cheevers The Knot Book. Greg Harrington gave a slide show of his travels while working in Denmark.

Joe McCleary gave a presentation on "Sharpening". The unveiling of a ship-in-the-bottle attributed to our own master model builder, William Clarke, preceded the presentation. Humble Mr. Clarke would not take credit for the creation of the unique object. An air of trepidation permeated the room as the members recalled the inscription on Mr. Clarke's license plate, "Get Even".

Following the presentation, the 2005 NRG Conference was discussed. The Clerk suggested that a set of unpublished minutes be kept regarding conference plans and discussions. The membership concurred. The Skipper appointed the following members to the conference committee: Jack Bobbitt, Bill Clarke, John Cheevers, Alan Frazer, and Joe McCleary.

The meeting was adjourned.

## Mystery Photo



Solution to Mystery Photo, *Logbook* No. 196: Last month was pathetic! We had two players and they failed to identify the vessel. But this month it seems we have another chance to identify an unusual tanker. In alphabetical terms, our photo suppliers must be in the "T's." In operational terms, another letter comes to mind. This vessel has a queer look about her, with queer being the optimal word, or more precisely, "Q" being the optimal letter. I'll explain all that in a moment. But first, I think congratulations are in order: At the last HRSMS meeting, Bill presented his second model in as many months. Viva, La Food Lion! Once again, his entire month was devoted to model work. This allowed Dave to submit his second Mystery Photo. So, Bill what are you building this month?

Unusual looking vessels usually have unusual stories to tell. And this Mystery Photo is no different. Exhibiting the classic tanker form, this vessel carries some interesting modifications in her superstructure. What are they and why were they made? Did anyone notice? Did anyone even play this month? Let's find out, because, you all know the rules, if no one plays you get an entire column devoted to my twisted logic.

One of the little known chapters of US Naval history reveals the story about a handful of ships that were employed as armed-decoys in World War Two. Dubbed "Q" ships by the British, their task was to lure German and Japanese submarines to the surface and ambush them with hidden weapons. This reprised an idea first used by the British in World War One. The fleet consisted of many types of vessel. While most were surplus sailing ships, there was the occasional fishing trawler, tramp steamer, and at least one oil tanker--*SS Gulf Dawn*.

The tactics employed were extremely simple and one has to ask how many German submarine skippers were gullible enough to take the bait. The plan was to operate these vessels in known sea-lanes and trick the submarine commander into making a surfaced attack with gunfire. What the designers of this reuse were counting on was that the submarine commander wouldn't waste a valuable torpedo on a lone, unescorted vessel. One of the more interesting aspects of the plan was the addition of a 'panic' crew whose duty was to fake an abandon ship if the vessel was challenged. The remainder of the crew would lie in wait with their hidden

*(Continued on page 2)*



(Continued from page 1)

weapons. When the submarine surfaced and drew within range, the “Q” ship would drop her disguise and open fire. In the case of the sail-powered “Q” ships a submarine was assigned to destroy the enemy after they surfaced to attack. I imagine that many a “Q” ship’s log is a dull read.

Well, this is October and that means Halloween season upon us; is it possible that our Mystery Photo subject is the aforementioned tanker *SS Gulf Dawn* masquerading as a “Q” ship? Absolutely, says Mark Heilenday as he asks to “be the 99th to guess BIG HORN--probably during her Q-ship incarnation with USN in 1942!” He follows this with general details of *Big Horn*’s career with the US Navy. Well Mark, I hate to tell you this but you’re not 99, you’re the first and, so far, the only player.

An excellent article in *Warship International*, No. 4, 1991, titled U. S. Navy Mystery Ships, written by Edward F. Beyer and Kenneth M. Beyer, lists one tanker among several steel ships used in “Project LQ” as the “Q” ship operation was known to the US Navy. Built as *SS Gulf Dawn* (hull No. 154) by the Sun Shipbuilding Company, Chester, Pennsylvania during 1935-1936, she was purchased by the US Navy on March 31, 1942 in New York City. Renamed *Big Horn* she was commissioned in the US Navy on April 16, 1942. She immediately sailed for the Boston Navy Yard for conversion into a “Q” ship. The conversion was complete by late July and she went to sea on July 22 for degaussing, compass calibration, and other trials. *Big Horn* was the last “Q” ship operated by the US Navy, serving in that capacity until January 1944. There followed her transfer to the US Coast Guard where she was became a weather ship and her designation became WAO-124. After one year as a weather ship she again transferred to the US Navy where her designation became IX-207 and she was used as a station tanker in the Pacific.

I mention these specific events and dates for a reason: our Mystery Photo is one of a series of photographs that document those “Q” ship trials. How do we know this? The article is richly illustrated with photographs of many of the “Q” ships. Some of these photographs come the collection of a Mr. A. D. Baker, III. I wonder who that could be? Among the various images of *SS Gulf Dawn* and *USS Big Horn* are two dated July 22, 1942. To quote the image caption: “Both taken...Boston Navy Yard (port side view Boston NY neg. no. 3128-42; starboard 3129-42), during a trip to the degaussing range.” The starboard side image is our Mystery Photo.

The conversion from tanker to pseudo warship made for an arguably strange profile. While her new profile was definitely different, it was only in keeping with the US Navy’s strange approach to catching a U-boat. The idea of taking a vessel type that was in desperately short supply and using her for bait to help destroy our country’s number one threat in 1942 is most definitely strange. The assumption has to be that the U-boat menace was greater than the loss of one tanker load of fuel. Therefore it was necessary to employ one tanker to catch many U-boats. According to DANFS, *Big Horn*’s history makes no mention of an engagement with

enemy submarines.

The modifications made to conceal *Big Horn*’s armament gave the vessel a very queer look. The most obvious departure from standard tanker form are the plated over walkways in both the bridge island and at the stern. This must have been done to provide space for a larger crew. It seems from the photographic evidence that the shell plate in way of the forecandle was extended aft several feet. This provided protection from the sea for two gun platforms. The platforms most likely didn’t flush with the forecandle deck, the absence of sheer making for a more level and user-friendly gun deck. By studying our Mystery Photo and its companion view in the WSI article, there appear to be two canvas-covered barrels pointing skyward at these platforms. Farther aft at the forward end of the aft deckhouse we see what appear to be canvas covered bulwarks. One can only imagine what they hide.

We know from the literature that the Q-ships of World War One were fitted with movable, hinged plating that opened to reveal their firepower. But with *Big Horn* it’s difficult to tell what weapons were hidden or how they worked. With only a stern gun visible, it’s difficult to validate her armament. This armament, while she was a Project LQ vessel, is somewhat of a mystery in itself. The five sources at my disposal differ widely as to what she carried during her career. As close as I can determine, she carried two 3-inch/50 rifle and two 40-MM cannon while she hunted submarines. This sounds rather meager, considering the strength of her opposition. (An interesting side note to *Big Horn*’s career: while in Coast Guard service her armament may have actually increased—a fact that may reflect the changing conditions of the war and is born out by the photographic record.)

Not every vessel that operated during World War Two served in its designed capacity. The requirements of war frequently made for strange bedfellows. We are all familiar with the surplus four-pipers that were converted to high speed transports and minesweepers, Sumner-class destroyers that were converted to minelayers, and the most visible example—cargo ships converted to aircraft carriers. But this conversion is perhaps the strangest of all.

Yes, we are in the “T’s!” But does the “T” stand for

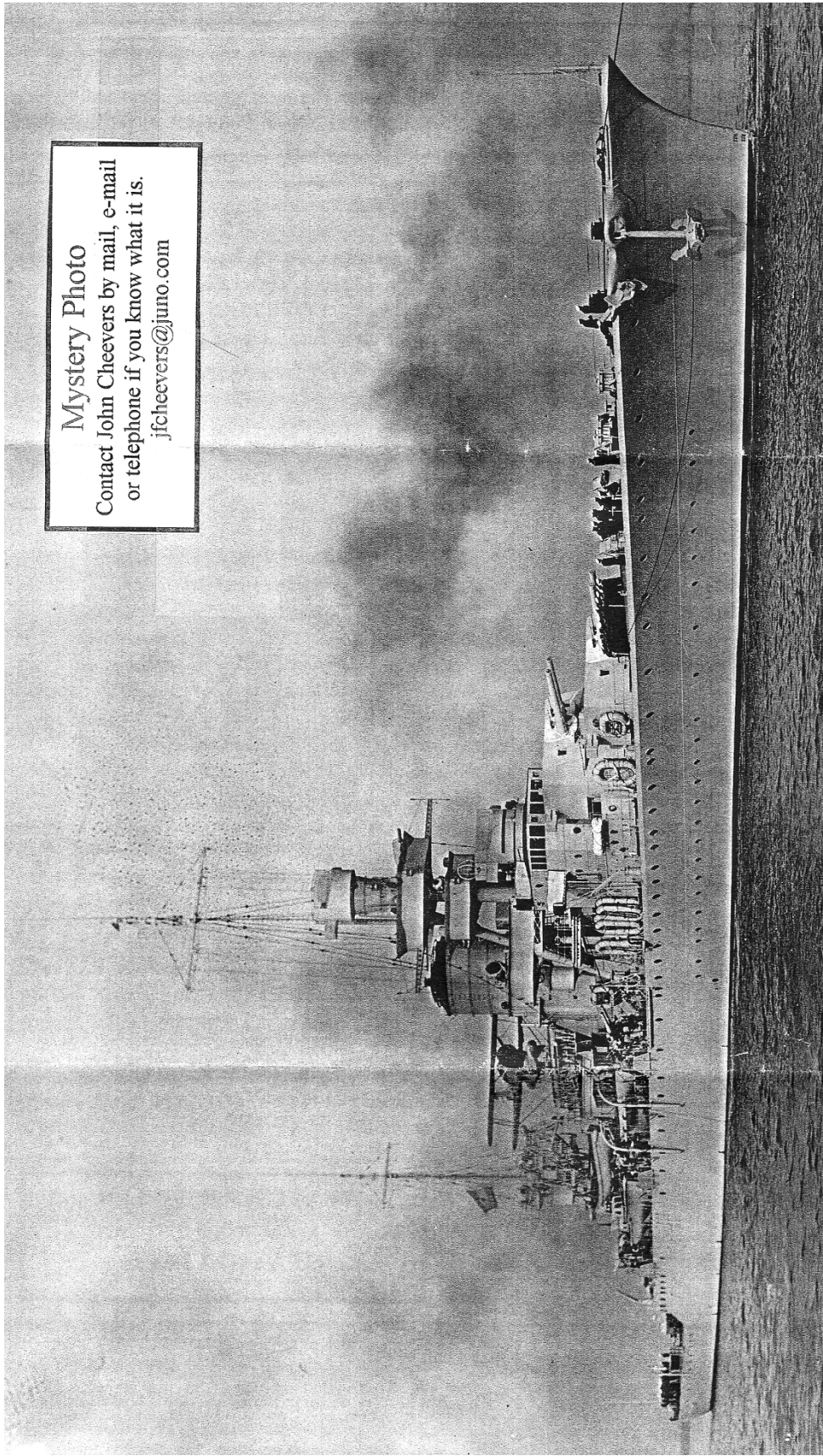
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## NOTICE

(WASHINGTON, D.C. October 15, 2002) On the eve of Veteran's Day, National Geographic EXPLORER ventures 230 feet below the sea on a perilous mission to retrieve one of the U.S. Navy's most important historic relics. Premiering Sunday, November 10, at 8 p.m. ET/PT on MSNBC, EXPLORER's Raising the USS Monitor takes viewers to the watery resting place of the USS Monitor, the legendary Civil War ironclad warship.

Excerpt from an article sent by Joe McCleary

**Mystery Photo**  
Contact John Cheevers by mail, e-mail  
or telephone if you know what it is.  
jfcheevers@juno.com



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## NOTABLE EVENTS

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### NOVEMBER

- 8 **H.R.S.M.S.** Monthly Meeting: Host; Heinz Shiller  
Presentation, "Rigging", Bob Comet

### DECEMBER

- 13 **H.R.S.M.S.** Monthly Meeting: Host, Jack Bobbitt  
Presentation, "Pewter Casting", Joe McCleary

### JANUARY

- 10 **H.R.S.M.S.** Monthly Meeting: Host, Bob Comet  
Presentation, "Why We Are Doing this", J. Bobbitt

### FEBRUARY

- 14 **H.R.S.M.S.** Monthly Meeting: Host, Dave Baker

### MARCH

- 14 **H.R.S.M.S.** Monthly Meeting: South Side Bunch

### APRIL

- 11 **H.R.S.M.S.** Monthly Meeting: Host, Dean Sword

### MAY

- 9 **H.R.S.M.S.** Monthly Meeting: Host, Bill Clarke  
17 International Small Craft Center Opening,  
Mariners' Museum

### JUNE

- 13 **H.R.S.M.S.** Monthly Meeting: Host, Alan Frazer

### JULY

- 11 **H.R.S.M.S.** Monthly Meeting: McCleary, Wine

### AUGUST

- 16 **H.R.S.M.S.** Monthly Meeting:

### SEPTEMBER

- 13 **H.R.S.M.S.** Monthly Meeting:  
20 Festival in the Park, Mariners' Museum  
27 Scientific & Navigational Instrument Exhibition  
Opening, Mariners' Museum

### OCTOBER

- 4 **H.R.S.M.S.** Monthly Meeting: Host,

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## Next Meeting

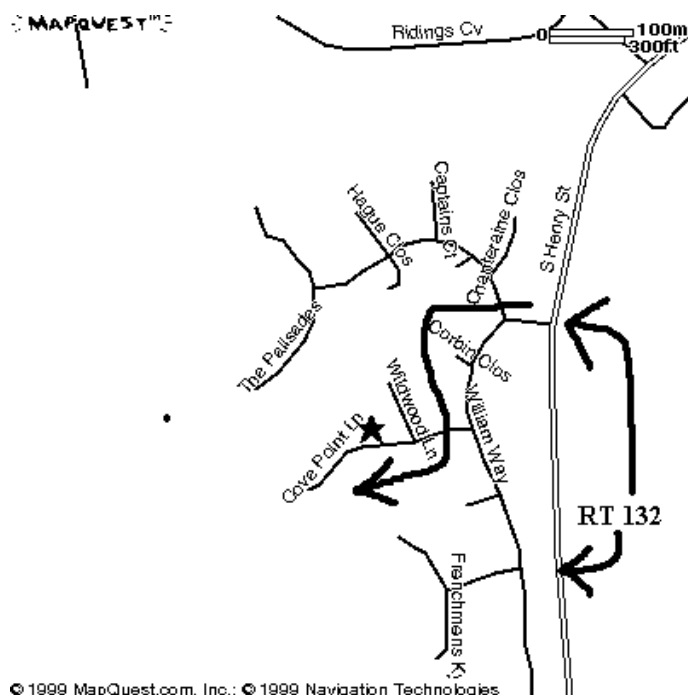
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The November meeting will be held on November 8, 2002, at 2000 hours. The meeting will be hosted by Heinz and Mareke Schiller, 133 Cove Point Lane, Williamsburg, VA 23185. Phone:757.564.6471

### Directions;

From points East: I-64 W, Take the VA-199 WEST exit 0.4, Merge onto VA-199 W. 3.0, Turn RIGHT onto S HENRY ST/VA-132. 0.9, Turn LEFT onto WILLIAM WAY. 0.1, Turn RIGHT onto COVE POINT LN. 0.1

From Points West: I-64 E., Take the VA-199 WEST exit and proceed as above.



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## Thanks

The members would like to thank the Greg Harrington for hosting the October meeting.

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## It's Not Too Late

**There are only 3 meetings in 2003 that need a host. Don't miss the opportunity to sign up.**

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## WATCH, QUARTER AND STATION BILL



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Skipper: Bob Comet (757) 934-1279  
1<sup>st</sup> Mate: Len Wine (757) 566-8597  
Purser: John Cheevers (757) 591-8955  
Clerk: Tom Saunders (757) 850-0580  
Historian: Len Wine (757) 566-8597  
Editors: John Cheevers (757) 591-8955  
Bill Clarke (757) 868-6809  
Tom Saunders (757)-850-0580