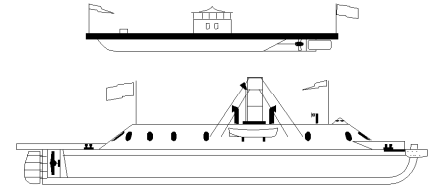


Hampton Roads Ship Model Society

Logbook



No. 204

JUNE, 2003

MINUTES



HRSMS Monthly Meeting
May 9, 2003
Host, Bill Clarke

The Skipper called the meeting to order at 2000 hours.

Correction: John Cheevers showed the book The World's Worst Warships, not the title reported.

A Purser's Report was given.

Old Business: Several details of the 2005 NRG Conference were discussed. Revisions and corrections to the HRSMS Constitution and Bylaws were approved by the membership. Thanks were given to Alan Frazer for compiling historical data that made the revisions possible. Tim Wood showed the draft of the HRSMS brochure. Several members brought models so photographs could be taken for the pamphlet. He was thanked for his effort and was asked to continue with the project.

New Business: John Cheevers, Bob Krumpen and Dave Baker signed up to host monthly meetings. Len Wine had several tee shirts for distribution to new members.

Show & Tell: Bill Altice presented magazines from Hugh Melton for inclusion in the library and a serving machine. Dave Baker showed The Shipcarvers Handbook and set up a six minute videotape on the Mariners' Museum Library for viewing after the meeting. Bill Clarke showed material from his recent trip to the U.K.

The meeting was adjourned to a presentation "Making Gratings and Window Frames" by Joe McCleary.

Thanks

The members would like to thank Bill Clarke for hosting the May meeting.

Mystery Photo



Answer to Mystery Photo #203: We know Clarke is home from the old country; he hosted the last meeting—our annual strawberry bacchanal, but it looks as if the photo contributor is still poking about on the far shore; and that's a good thing! If you'll notice, we have another port side image of a warship, but still no answer to last month's question.

Unusual might be the word for this month; quirky might work, too. The photo contributor seems to have tapped into the not-so-mainstream line of specialized warships that all nations produce from time to time. If you didn't recognize this vessel, it would be easy to say, "Look at what little Johnnie built!" It almost looks as if it was assembled from pieces in the left over parts box. The ironic part about a statement like this is that there is an element of truth in it—as you will see.

In the first half of the 20th century, British draftsmen had an interesting style of naval architecture. Gone were all the Victorian era bric-a-brac and gingerbread and colorful paint schemes. Now the vessels were taking on a bland utilitarian look that was accented by the dull, gray monochromatic hue of the architecture. The ships all had a massive, heavy look about them. The conservative hull lines with straight stems, prominent shell inserts, and massive funnels and masts contributed to the feeling. The British had a way of designing vessels that immediately looked old. We don't see that much with their fleet today, but when this mystery vessel was built, its almost as if she was delivered with an aged patina. Could it simply be that she was a near repeat of a twenty-year-old design?

I'm not sure in my mind whether it we should call this vessel a ship. An armed, motorized or self-propelled barge might be the better term. Certainly, the nation that produced this vessel has treasure to spare. Building single use warships in the "steel navy" era is, indeed, a luxury! To authorize upwards of forty of these monsters would almost guarantee a wealthy nation—or a severely desperate one. The fact that this vessel is a reprise of a twenty-year idea suggests that the conflict she was involved in was not quite settled in the first go round.

OK, I've already given you giant clues on where to go to find this vessel. Does anyone need additional help or more time before we proceed? Good!

There was a flurry of activity when the *Logbook* came out as players jockeyed for the pole position. Bob Krumpen won it with his timely email; Tim Woods and Bob



(Continued from page 1)

Comet followed him in quick order. All three correctly identified the mystery vessel as *HMS Abercrombie*, a World War Two (WWII) vintage monitor (constructed for shore bombardment only) and the last of her breed.

Krumpen offers the definitive proof that this mystery ship is *Abercrombie*, by citing the excellent book about British monitors titled Big Gun Monitors, by Ian Buxton. Long out of print, if you have a copy, you have a real gem. In this book, Bob directs us to page 144 to an excellent profile drawing (with scale bar) of *Abercrombie* as completed. In the image caption Bob points out that her sister ship, *HMS Roberts*, was completed with a shorter funnel, secondary armament (4-inch) fitted one deck lower, and no Oerlikons (20-MM) on the turret roof. That's proof enough to cement the identification. He finishes with this: "*HMS Abercrombie* was completed in May 1943 and discarded in 1954."

Statistically, *Abercrombie* is just as off the wall as her appearance. Displacing only 7,970 tons, with a LOA of 373-1/2 feet, a beam of 89-3/4 feet, and a depth of 11 feet, she is not very imposing until you come face to face with her single twin 15-inch main turret. Her maximum beam is measured across her wide semi-submerged bulges; the hull width at her main and upper decks at 54 feet is considerably narrower. Where the sloping face of these bulges intersects the water the hull takes on an earthy "ironclad *Virginia*-ish" quality. (For comparison, the ungainly US Navy crane ship *Kearsarge*, a converted and bulged pre-dreadnought battleship, has a similar hull shape.) Her small 4,500 SHP twin boiler, twin-screw power plant was sufficient for a transit speed in the 10 to 12 knot range.

The fact that *Abercrombie* was even built was fortuitous. The British navy authorized almost 40 monitors for service during the Great War. Lacking real fighting value outside of their intended shore bombardment capacity, they were liabilities in peacetime. The signing of the Naval Limitation treaties in the twenties and thirties categorized vessels with main caliber armament larger than 8-inches as battleships. Since these vessels were not battleships in any way except for the caliber of their main armament, all but three monitors were gone by Britain's entry into World War Two.

When Winston Churchill returned as First Lord of the Admiralty on September 3, 1939, the same day that Britain declared war on Germany, he immediately set about gauging the condition of the Royal Navy. At two naval facilities, Portsmouth and Chatham, he found WWI vintage monitors, in poor repair, and he recalled their use in engagements off the coast of continental Europe. Realizing that this ship type could again contribute to successful campaigns, he wasted little time in authorizing a single new-build. In short order, designers presented a design that copied from the best from the old monitors—the hull form and general layout. The major improvement over the older designs was to update the protection against air attack. To shorten construction time the 15-inch main gun and turret machinery was recycled and upgraded from the old monitor *Marshal Soult*.

The resulting monitor, *HMS Roberts*, was

commissioned October 6, 1941, a new ship with a very dated appearance. She would have laid claim to being the last of her type had the Germans not sunk the old monitor, *HMS Terror*, off of North Africa early in the same year. Since *Terror* performed so well, a replacement was immediately ordered. The design for this new ship benefited from slight improvements suggested by *Terror's* last Commanding Officer making her marginally better than *Roberts*.

This new monitor was laid down on April 4, 1941, at the Vickers-Armstrong Naval Yard at Newcastle. Visually similar to *Roberts* except for the aforementioned differences, she was launched on March 31, 1942. Ian Buxton notes that she was christened *Abercrombie*, reviving a World War One (WWI) monitor name complete with misspelling. (Does anyone know the correct spelling of *Abercrombie*?)

Again, the British were fortunate in being able to build *Abercrombie* at all. If it wasn't for the availability of the spare twin 15-inch gun turret set-aside for *HMS Furious*, should her experimental 18-inch single turrets prove to be failures, construction of this ship during the war could not have happened. As it was, *Furious* was converted to an aircraft carrier deleting the requirement for the turret and gun, which remained in storage for over twenty-five years.

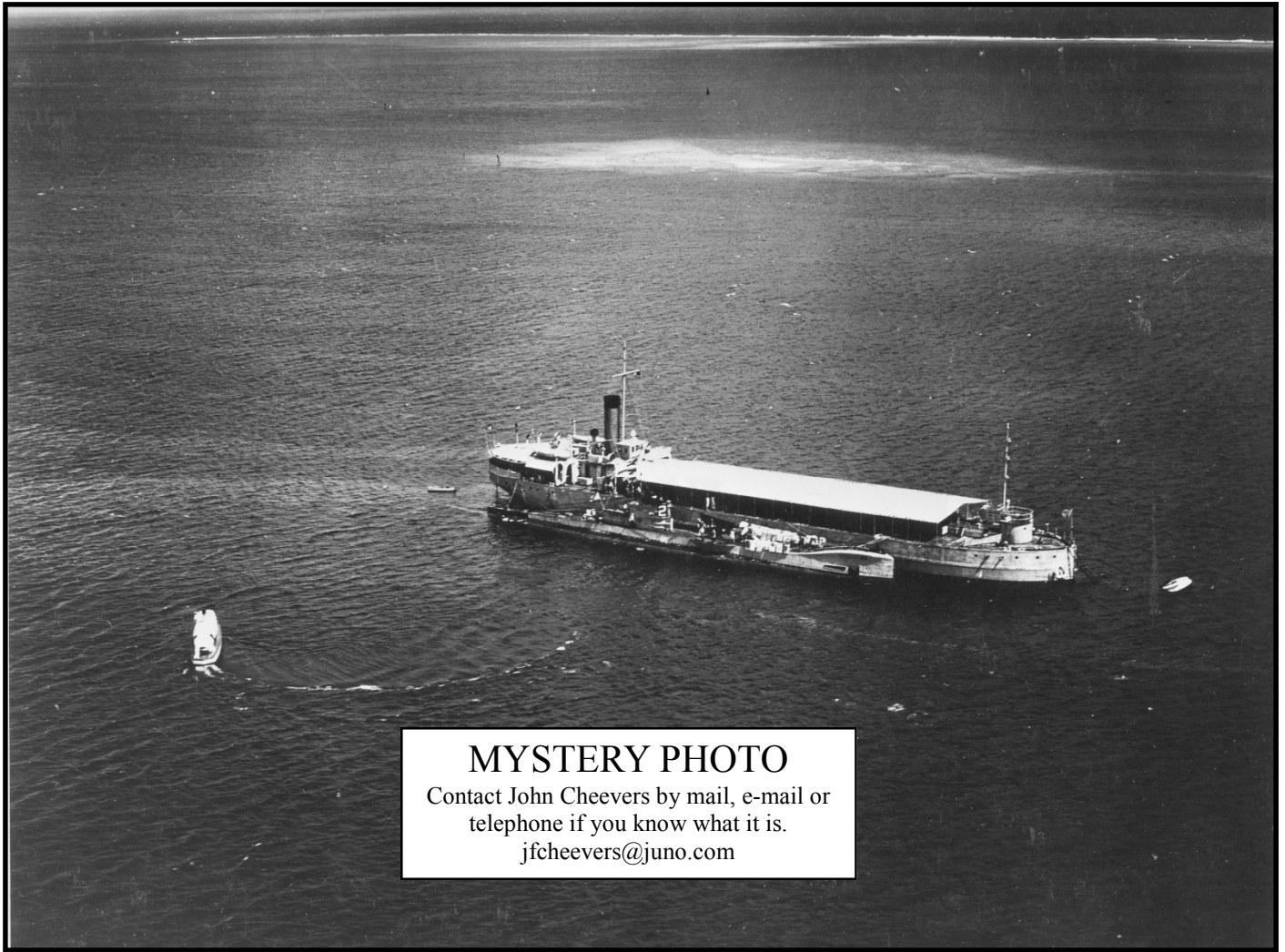
Completed on May 5, 1943, *Abercrombie* saw service in support of the Sicilian Landings and other campaigns. Further service was severely limited because of mine damage. Taken from regular service following the end of WWII, she was used as a receiving ship and accommodation vessel until she was discarded in 1954.

Bill Clarke promised to play Mystery Photo this month. Alas, nothing was received from him so I can only conclude he was too busy. He did, however, reveal the focus of his argument. Bill felt that identifying this vessel would be relatively easy, so he planned to explain the use of the strange A-shaped attachment at the bow. Looks like I get to do it!

When I mentioned the excellent profile drawing of *Abercrombie* in Buxton's book, I failed to mention the other 4 pages of excellent drawings—enough to build a decent model. On page 148 we find a fairly detailed upper deck plan that shows stowage for four paravanes and two sets handling gear for them. Also shown on this plan is the A-frame bracket. The accompanying text mentions says this bracket was for towing the paravanes and was hinged to reach back over the deck, lift a paravane, swing it over the stem, and lower it over the bow. We see the bracket in the "stowed" position.

Last month I, again, reminded everyone how design cues can identify a vessel's country of origin. We had the opportunity again this month. The best design feature or cue is not the vessel's most obvious feature, but instead is the enclosed main armament director platform. It looks like it was lifted from a World War One British battleship and transplanted directly atop the bridge of this vessel. We also had the opportunity to see and understand why a vessel looked older than it was. And we were introduced to a new and very useful reference work. Kudos to those that played and the photo contributor.

John Cheevers



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



Joe McCleary giving a presentation on Gratings and Window Frames at the May Meeting.



Above - Members' work will be showcased in the HRSMS brochure now in production



Right - Bob Comet is celebrating Bill Clarke's Annual Strawberry Fest

NOTABLE EVENTS

JUNE

- 13 **H.R.S.M.S.** Monthly Meeting: Host, Alan Frazer
Presentation, Lofting for Modelmakers, Jack Bobbitt

JULY

- 11 **H.R.S.M.S.** Monthly Meeting: McCleary, Wine
Presentation, CAD for Ship Modeling, Len Wine

AUGUST

- 8 **H.R.S.M.S.** Monthly Meeting: Host Eric Harfst

SEPTEMBER

- 6 Mid-Atlantic Maritime Festival
6 2003 Sship Model Regatta & Display
Independance Seaport Museum, Philidelphia, Pa.
12 **H.R.S.M.S.** Monthly Meeting: Host, John Cheevers
20 Festival in the Park, Mariners' Museum
27 Scientific & Navigational Instrument Exhibition
Opening, Mariners' Museum

OCTOBER

- 10 **H.R.S.M.S.** Monthly Meeting: Host, Greg Harrington

NOVEMBER

- 14 **H.R.S.M.S.** Monthly Meeting: Host; Heinz Schiller

DECEMBER

- 12 **H.R.S.M.S.** Monthly Meeting: Host, Jack Bobbitt

JANUARY

- 9 **H.R.S.M.S.** Monthly Meeting: Host: Bob Comet

FEBRUARY

- 13 **H.R.S.M.S.** Monthly Meeting: Host, Dave Baker
Election of Officers

MARCH

- 12 **H.R.S.M.S.** Monthly Meeting: Bob Krumpen

APRIL

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

MAY

- 14 **H.R.S.M.S.** Monthly Meeting: Host, Bill Clarke

**WATCH, QUARTER
AND
STATION BILL**



Skipper: Joe McCleary (757) 253-1802
Mate: Dave Baker (757) 565-7991
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

Next Meeting

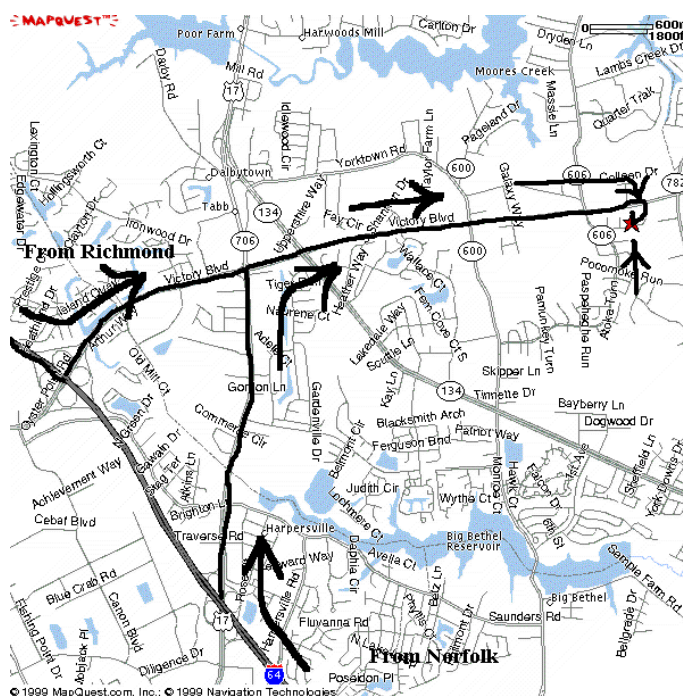
Date: June 13, 2003

Time: 2000 Hours

Place: 105 Accomac Turning, Yorktown, VA

Host: Alan Frazer

Easiest route from East or West is via I-64 to Exit 256-B, marked "Victory Boulevard (Route 171 North) Poquoson/ Yorktown." Follow 171 for about 3.4 miles, to seventh light. Turn right onto Running Man Trail (Route 606); first possible left to Tuckahoe Trace (Route 1630); then third left into Accomac Turning (1631), to third house on left (The route numbers appear on every street in the neighborhood, and are lower and easier to read at night than the street names). Early arrivals please park in the driveway. Those coming from Hampton and East will probably know shortcuts to Route 171 via Magruder Boulevard/Hampton Highway (134), Big Bethel Road (600) and other combinations; a good Peninsula map will help others to learn them. There is no shortcut from the west. If you get lost, call 867-7666.



THE ANSWER

The answer to Mystery Photo 203:
H.M.S. Abercrombie, 26th June 1946