

The weather forecast was not good but promised conditions well within our operating limits and at 1144 the next morning, 17th January, we took off from Bermuda. Our intended destination, selected for security reasons, was Pembroke Dock in Milford Haven with Poole, in Dorset, as an alternative. It was not until we were past the "point of no return" that Mr. Churchill mentioned His Majesty's stricture, which caused someone to observe that "we had all the baskets in one egg."

While still west of Ireland the weather commenced to deteriorate at Pembroke Dock and we were advised to divert to Poole. Before reaching Lands End, however, the weather closed in at Poole also and I decided to land at Plymouth which was still open and close at hand. We

did a "procedure let-down" on the Plympton radio transmitter outside the town and, approaching from seaward so as to avoid risk of collision with the balloon barrage, landed on the Sound. We touched down at 0859, having covered 2,924 nautical miles in 17 hours 55 minutes.

Two days later I had the pleasure of lunching with Mr. and Mrs. Churchill in their Whitehall flat and some weeks afterwards was summoned to 10 Downing Street, where, in the Cabinet Room, the Prime Minister presented me with a silver tray bearing an appropriate inscription and engraved with the facsimile signatures of my recent passengers. It was on that occasion we discussed further flights, some of which came to pass and some which did not.

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## H.M.S. "CONWAY" CHIEF OFFICER

By CAPTAIN DIGBY JONES (1920-22)

**I**N January, 1944, I had the unique experience of returning to the old Ship as Chief Executive Officer, twenty-two years after having left as a Cadet.

It has been the practice since the school's inception for the Chairman of the Management Committee to be a prominent Liverpool merchant or shipowner. Mr. Lawrence Holt had succeeded Sir Frederick Bowring and he was also, in 1944, Chairman of the company in which I serve. In 1939 the Chief and Second Officers, both being in the R.N.R., joined the Royal Navy. As a result, Commander Douglas (Monty), who had retired as Chief Officer returned to his former post to fill the breach. After the move to the Menai Straits caused by the Liverpool air raids, Commander Douglas decided to resume his retirement. He was succeeded by the first of the Blue Funnel Line Chief Officers who were asked by Mr. Lawrence Holt to take over for a year. Thus it was that I became the third temporary Chief Officer of "Conway." My predecessors had been Captain Eric Radford (1942) and Captain Frank Brown (1943).

It was with some curiosity that I first approached Bangor to rejoin the old Ship, for I wondered what changes there had been since I left so long ago. Arriving on board I found Captain Goddard and all the staff most friendly and helpful. They made the take-over seem little different to that of joining any other ship as Chief Officer and very soon I was settled in.

My recollections are of the last year of the recent war, a time of trial for "Conway" with staff shortages and, indeed, shortages of every kind. "Conway" was a school and yet a ship with most of the problems of all ships and some more. There was no priority of any kind but the generous help of Mr. Lawrence Holt by way of the Blue Funnel Line organisation kept the Ship on an even keel. It was an exhilarating period in the school's history, with the Ship's roll of Cadets reaching its peak at between 250 and 260. In addition, there were 30 to 40 Cadets at Gordonstoun School. The Cadets at

Gordonstoun spent a year there under the late Captain MacGregor, an "Old Conway," before joining the Ship as second year cadets. The capacity of the Ship was stretched to the limit and to ease the sleeping problem, thirteen cadets were accommodated ashore for the night at a house named "Bryn Mel." Another group of cadets, fourth term, went in a party of twelve to the Outward Bound Sea School at Aberdovey for a month. They went in three successive parties each term and so helped to relieve the congestion on board.

The Outward Bound Sea School was an idea of Mr. Lawrence Holt to bring boys from every walk in life together for a month. At Aberdovey they combined in athletics, mountain expeditions, small boat work and a cruise at sea. The basis of the scheme was to create a spirit of service to the community. Gordonstoun School had been evacuated to Merionethshire and their schooner, "Prince Louis" was based at Aberdovey. The detailed planning of the scheme was the joint work of Captain Goddard and Mr. Kurt Hahn, Headmaster of Gordonstoun School. "Conway" cadets and Gordonstoun boys provided the nucleus for the first course and the "Prince Louis" was made available for sea cruises. Both "Conway" and Gordonstoun influences are to be seen in the Outward Bound Sea School organisation. From the first Mr. Lawrence Holt's idea was a success and it has long outgrown its modest beginning. Now it is the Outward Bound Trust, spreading its influence far and wide, with several Outward Bound Schools—even one in Malaya.

The Menai Straits provided an ideal setting for the Ship in every way. The beauty of the surroundings, the cleanliness of the atmosphere, the facilities for outdoor activities, sailing and boat work generally, and the improved health of the cadets throughout the year were a vast improvement over the Mersey location. Sailing was possible all the year round in three dinghies, a cutter, and a fishing smack, with inter-top gig and cutter

races being held each term. In the summer the cadets swam overside from the Ship and a gala swimming sports day was held at the Beaumaris Swimming Bath. Regular boat services were run from the Ship to Bangor Pier and the Garth Slipway in Anglesey. The use of motor boats was limited by the shortage of petrol, which was difficult to obtain and necessitated stringent economy. This had the advantage of providing plenty of rowing practice in the cutters. The Bangor Football Club's ground was excellent for First XV matches, with professional facilities of grandstand and changing rooms. It also served us well for the Annual Sports Day. The remainder of the cadets went to Beaumaris to play in the extensive grounds of Baron Hill House. They changed in the cells of the ancient Beaumaris gaol. It had, of course, ceased to be used as a gaol for many years past and is a fascinating place with one of the few surviving treadmills. Athletics took place in a field adjoining Bryn Mel House and cross-country races were regularly held over a course in Anglesey.

Games fixtures were very restricted owing to war-time travelling difficulties. This problem was solved by dividing the cadets into six groups, each group being given the name of a ship "Cossack," "Ohio," etc. The tops were not suitable as they each consisted of a particular term in contrast to a "ship" which was a cross-section of the whole, being similar in composition to a school house. The system provided competition in every sphere of the cadets' activities.

A most valuable acquisition was the "Indefatigable's" water boat. The "Indefatigable" had also evacuated to the Menai Straits but into a shore establishment and no longer required their water boat. It was a motor boat with four water tanks. By keeping two tanks filled diagonally it could be used for a variety of purposes. In conjunction with No. 1 Motor Boat it was employed transporting large parties of cadets ashore quickly on landing days. For coaling ship it was indispensable and it was useful for salvaging sunken boats when such mishaps occasionally occurred. The water boat could lift any of the boats from the bottom with sweeps by working the tides and carry it into shallow water. At low tide a salvaged boat would be dried out, repaired if necessary and returned to moorings on the rising tide. As the water boat steered by wheel, the cadets became competent helmsmen.

With the large numbers on board it was possible to have a practical class under the Chief Officer during school sessions. One class would be available for the

whole of the morning and another in the afternoon. The classes changed each day so that all cadets had their turn in the practical class. They ran the duty boats, kept gangway watch, coaled ship, went sailing, and in general, were occupied in practical sailorising. This enabled every cadet, without exception, to take his turn as coxswain, boat engineer, and at other duties not normally coming his way out of school.

At the start of each term eighty tons of coal had to be brought on board from a dump on the quayside at Penrhyn Dock, Bangor. The coal was required for firing the boiler on the upper deck. As there was no shore labour available, coaling ship was the formidable task of the practical class. Eight large ballast baskets and about forty bags were filled from the dump and stowed on the water boat's deck. At the Ship the baskets and bags were hoisted through the port gangway door on to the lower deck and trucked forward to the bunker hatch. The academic staff suffered the inevitable noise during school with commendable patience. This dirty job would take up two weeks and all hands were thankful when it was finished. We could then thoroughly clean up and make a firm start on the term's activities.

In retrospect, my period as "Conway" Chief Officer was a happy time of which I retain treasured memories and the satisfaction of many a war-engendered difficulty overcome. Such a desirable result was due to the unabated enthusiasm of my executive colleagues, who cheerfully carried on with one Warrant Officer instead of the normal two.

Captain Goddard, by his tact and unruffled calm, successfully carried through the educational and recreational reforms which were so obviously overdue. He came to the Ship when the total number of cadets was little over a hundred. When he left, the complement was over 250 cadets on board, the maximum the Ship could possibly contain. I feel privileged to have served him for a time as his Chief Executive Officer.

Latterly the Ship was feeling her age. She leaked above and below and it was difficult to keep pace with the essential renewal of rotted timbers. In fact, her maintenance had become a financial burden. A change was necessary to the shore, especially as this was the opinion of H.M. School Inspectors. So came into being the present shore base as conceived and long advocated by Captain Goddard. The shore-based H.M.S. "Conway," with the traditions of three "Conway" ships as a background, is now well able to hold its own as a modern school in this atomic age.

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