



**HMS AJAX & RIVER PLATE
VETERANS ASSOCIATION**

**Memorial Service
To Mark the 90th Anniversary
Commissioning of HMS AJAX
Portsmouth 15th April 1935**

Held at the Normandy Memorial Wall
D-Day Story Museum, Portsmouth

Saturday 27th September 2025 11.00 a.m.

**HMS AJAX & RIVER PLATE VETERANS
ASSOCIATION REUNION
HELD AT ROYAL MARITIME HOTEL, PORTSMOUTH
FRIDAY 26TH – SATURDAY 27TH SEPTEMBER 2025**

After many months of planning, 39 members and friends gathered at the Royal Maritime Hotel in Portsmouth on Friday, 26th September 2025, in readiness for the main events the following day, Saturday 27th September, when another 17 would join us.

The Committee members gathered for a pre-AGM meeting on the Friday afternoon and thereafter most attendees made their way to the nearby Ship Anson, a well-known sailor's retreat: judging by the various WhatsApp posts and clips, a great time was had by all who had retired there.

With breakfast running from 7.30am until 10am, most attendees were up and fed in good time for the 9am Annual General Meeting held in the Hotel.

The AGM ended in good time for us to get ourselves ready for the Commemorative Service for the 90th Anniversary of the Commissioning of HMS Ajax at Portsmouth on 15th April 1935, due to start at 11am at the Normandy Memorial Wall, D-Day Story Museum on Southsea sea front, Portsmouth. We mustered at the Hotel front entrance to await our transport – a 1963 Leyland Double Decker bus that brought back memories for many of us. Dave was the driver and the “Clippie” was Bob Chalmers. Bob is an Association member as well as a member of the local Bus Preservation Society and had arranged this splendid transport for us ... and not only that, but covered the ‘usual’ donation to the Society for the free use of the bus. Excellent and well done Bob & Dave, with thanks all round. The Chairman presented both with an Association Pennant as part of the Commemorative Service.

We arrived in good time to find the HMS Nelson Royal Naval Volunteer Band already set up in front of the Memorial Wall and looking really smart. Seating had been provided by the Museum where we had hired a room as a wet-weather contingency venue – however, the weather Gods once again had smiled upon us as we gathered in perfect weather, which meant the room wasn't required, although the Band Members could use it.

The Marching contingent, under the watchful eye of our new March Commander, Dave Lear, assembled in the car park, and once given the signal, stepped off to the Band music. It was great to see quite a number of on-lookers taking an interest and fortunately we had enough service sheets to go round. Apparently, the GB Olympic Beach Volleyball teams were practicing just across the road from us but stopped as a mark of respect for us – nice touch.

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the service before handing over to Malcolm Collis who, as part of his Introduction*, outline why we were here; firstly, in Portsmouth, because it was the 90th Anniversary of the Ajax Commissioning, and secondly, before the Normandy D-Day Memorial Wall, because of Ajax's involvement in that Campaign. We were in front of the Ship's Badge we had sponsored and also the two Bricks we had also sponsored for our two surviving D-Day Veterans; Albert Robb 107 & Allan Lorriman 100. There was also a brick sponsored by Adam Prickett for his grandfather Ronald Prickett.

*Available here <https://www.hmsajax.org/2025-events>

Peter Danks then read out the Names of the six Members who had Crossed the Bar** since our last Reunion: Paul Littlewood; Dennis Talbot; Doreen Fowler; Pat Brown; Inge Nedden-Langsdorff; Phil Pullen. Mike Cranswick delivered the Act of Remembrance followed by The Exhortation. Mike Fox dipped the Standard as the Last Post played and then, following Reveille, Mayor Shaun Collier and

Councillor Rob Tyler Morin, laid a wreath on behalf of the Town of Ajax in Ontario. Adam Prickett laid the Association's wreath. Our thanks go to Stuart & Lois Birrell who generously sponsored the wreaths.

Following the National Anthem, Malcolm Collis thanked everyone for attending, thanked the Band for the wonderful music and then congratulated the Marchers for their precision march-on. The Band continued with some Closing music.

The full Order of Service with Facts & Figures on the Cruiser can be found here <https://www.hmsajax.org/2025-events>

Thanks to a slow puncture on the bus, the return of those not wishing to visit the museum, at a discounted rate, was somewhat delayed as a Tyre company had to be called out. Fortunately, the museum were aware of our numbers and the café was ready for the increased trade.

The Chairman presented a Pennant to the Museum for facilitating our visit and service.

Following a good look round the museum and the Landing Craft the bus was finally ready to roll and with what I thought was everybody onboard, off we set, agreeing there was now no need to return as everyone was on board – wrong! Some were left behind – Sorry!

What was left of the afternoon free time was a good excuse for some to return to the Ship Anson, while others walked to the Shopping Centre near the Spinnaker. Later, there was a certain rugby match on with England versus Canada in the World Cup Final.

Our Rum Bosun, Mike Fox, was all set up with his rum tub ready for the 6.30pm Up-Spirits; he had also set out his Merchandise stall and had press-ganged our Treasurer, Stuart Specke, into being the stall holder. Dave Leer took charge of Raffle Sales.

To make the most of our time, the Chairman gave a welcome to all at this point, and invited the Mayor of Ajax to say a few words, particularly regarding the 2026 visit. Dinner was served at 7.30pm and Mike & Kathy Cranswick, as part of the Table Planning had helpfully displayed diners' choices on the respective tables, saving a lot head scratching trying to remember what had been ordered.

Following a splendid four course meal and the Loyal Toast, the timing was perfect for the 9.30pm slot for our entertainer, Shep Woolley, a singer and comedian of some renown, with a naval background, who kept us amused until 10.30pm. The raffle was then drawn and three donated items were auctioned.

The rest of what remained of the evening was spent circulating and socialising until numbers dwindled and even the die-hards retired, eventually, even though the Bars had shut at midnight.

Breakfast the next morning was a good opportunity for a final farewell to those that made it, before setting off on the journeys home. Some were stopping an extra night.

Thanks go to all those Committee Members and assistants involved in the planning.

Malcolm Collis
October 2025
www.hmsajax.org

***The term "Cross the Bar", to die, is said to have been taken from the 1889 poem by Alfred, Lord Tennyson and compares death with crossing the "sandbar" between the river of life, with its outgoing flood, and the ocean that lies beyond, death, the boundless deep, to which we return.*

More images & videos can be found here - <https://www.hmsajax.org/2025-events>

