



NEWSLETTER

DECEMBER 2025

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Nec Quisquam Nisi Ajax

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CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Hello everyone. I hope this newsletter finds you all well and looking forward to Christmas, the shops and media have been getting ready for it since late summer!

It really has been a busy period for the Association; we started off in late September with our Reunion at The Royal Maritime Hotel in Portsmouth and a [full report and photos](#) can be found later in this Newsletter.

I am sure all who attended will agree it was a resounding success. Most guests arrived on the Friday evening, dining out and a lot of us gathered in the Ship Anson pub for a karaoke session, very enjoyable.

Saturday morning had us up bright and early; breakfast and then the AGM which was very well attended. Then we gathered in the foyer to be picked up by a vintage double decker bus which transported us to the D-Day Memorial Wall in Southsea. A small platoon of us completed what is now becoming a tradition at the reunion, a march on, halting directly in front of the Wall, I must say for a bunch of old Matelots we don't do too badly.

The Gala dinner evening was, as always, a most enjoyable event with the traditional "Up Spirits" - many thanks to Mike Fox our Rum Bosun; the merchandise table was manned by Stuart "Yorkie" Speck, the raffle was run by Dave Lear. The raffle this year had a 'first': I had managed to slip away to the Ship Anson that afternoon for one or two shandies and bought two tickets for the pub's meat raffle and had the good fortune to win with both tickets ... so what to do with a lamb shank and a piece of topside? ... it proved to be a very popular prize in our own raffle.

Sunday morning saw most guests leave; a few of us stayed to the Monday morning. An excellent weekend with a massive thanks to all the committee for their time and effort, especially Malcom Collis and Mike Cranswick who took the lead. I will not say we, as an Association, are unique, I but from what I can gather, there are few naval associations that hold formal reunions like ours, something of which I am very proud.

The next event was the associations presence at the

Cenotaph for Remembrance Sunday, a very special day. Again, a full report and photos can be found later in this Newsletter.

Most of us stayed at a hotel in Borough Market near London Bridge and in the shadow of the Shard. The market is a fascinating place with dozens of restaurants and Street food vendors. It also has a curious museum - The Clink Jail! It was an actual prison and was situated on Clink Street, hence the phrase "He's in the clink"; well worth a visit.



Mike Fox and myself arrived at the Hotel on the Thursday and met up with Paul Byrne who



works at The Royal Hospital Chelsea. Paul kindly took us on short tour of the Hospital, finishing off in the Hospital's bar where we met up with a group of Canadian Army personnel who, like us, were visiting the Hospital. We introduced ourselves and they told us they were based in Toronto, so we naturally thought they would know all about the Town of Ajax, but no, they had never heard of its history, which came as a bit of surprise, but they were genuinely interested and said they would visit the Town,. We had our photograph taken with them and a good time was had by all!

On the Friday Mike and I had a visit to HMS Belfast, the Second World War Battleship which is moored on the Thames, a fascinating tour. What I found remarkable was the size of it as it had a crew of one thousand men compared to the 250 on our Ajax; Mike and I took particular interest in the Galley.



After our visit we crossed the river over Tower Bridge and walked around the Tower of London; one sight was this display of poppies.

Whilst we were there two Navy patrol boats came up the river and the bridge was raised for them.



That evening we visited the Union Jack Club, the venue for our 2022 reunion; it was very busy with veterans arriving for the parade. It was good to meet up with a few people we knew.

Sunday morning arrived and 14 of us mustered in the foyer, then to the tube and then to Horse Guards Parade to join the 10,000 attendees. The weather was wonderful; one or two people struggled with the heat which was

amazing in November. I was joined by my son Robert who served in the Army in Afghanistan - quite a proud moment.



The Parade went very well and the salute after the parade was taken by the Duke of Edinburgh. We dined at a pub in Mayfair called 'The Goat' and a good time was had by all! Thanks must go again to Mike Cranswick for doing a first-class job in organising our day - Thank you.

The next event is the Association's visit to Ajax in May/June next year to commemorate the ship's visit in 1976. The town is organising a week of events, including more street dedications. We are having video calls with the Town Council and we will keep you up to date as soon as everything is sorted. At the moment we have between 50 to 60 people attending.

It just remains for me to wish you all a Very Merry Christmas and a Happy and Healthy New Year.

Nigel Masters - Chairman

SECRETARY'S REPORT

December newsletter, surely not!! It only seems like last week that we had the Reunion in Portsmouth.

I very much hope that everyone who attended had a great time. I had not been back to Portsmouth in many years, the memories of coming back from leave into Portsmouth Harbour railway station and the dockyard gates came flooding back. Some old haunts still there but many, many changes. As always, it was great to catch up with friends.

No sooner had that weekend finished; last minute preparations were underway for the Remembrance Parade in London. That too, came around in a flash; I'll leave you to read my separate report on that weekend.

No rest for the wicked, on to planning for next year's celebratory visit to Ajax. Nigel and I had a team video call with the town to discuss the plans so far. Delighted to say that plans are well advanced with the week pretty much mapped out (30th May to 6th June 2026 inc.). On the very first full day, there will be a welcome reception to be held close to the Port of Oshawa where the ship docked in 1976. There will be a march/procession which will involve the Royal Canadian Legion and our own veterans. During the week there will be street dedications, the unveiling of the latest and final 1976 wall panel at Veterans Point and an opportunity to see the new crosswalk (featured in this Newsletter). A visit to Fire HQ to see the engines (featured in the September Newsletter) with their new livery featuring the ships from the River Plate. There will be a reception at a new museum/archive space which will be launched for the month of June and possible plans to visit an elementary school that opened the same year as the ship's visit.

We are working on a day out with our good friends at Whitby Yacht Club, who themselves will be celebrating an anniversary year, their 60th. The hope is that we will also do the obligatory day out to Niagara Falls/Niagara on the Lake. We are working to secure transport for these two events.

The week will wrap up on the following Saturday with the Mayor's Gala

We have 53 members/family so far committed to the week. Set to be the largest group we have taken over the pond.

Plenty of work left to do, but it promises to be a fantastic week. If you are still thinking about coming along but have not been in touch, please contact me at mikecranswick@live.co.uk

It just leaves me wishing everybody a very happy Christmas and a healthy new year. Thank you for your support of the association and long may it continue. Nec Quisquam Nisi Ajax

Mike Cranswick
Secretary

2026 REUNION UPDATE

Following on from the AGM at Portsmouth, it was agreed that we would include a visit to our Memorial at the NMA in 2026 and endeavor to find a company to take on all the planning of the 2026 Reunion: we have now engaged with a company called S F Events who are looking at venues within striking distance of the NMA. This will be the last weekend in September 2026 and the company has already outlined an attractive weekend package.

Still early days, but information will be circulated, probably in the New Year, but for now, mark that weekend in your diary, now, or whenever Santa Claus brings you a 2026 one.

Your Planning Committee

MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY'S UPDATE

I am delighted to report that, with one or two exceptions, there are no outstanding subscriptions - thanks everybody – this does make life so much easier. If you don't pay by a renewing Faster Payment In (FPI) or Standing Order, just check your last payment date and make a manual transfer to save me having to chase – subscriptions remain at £12 & £18 family. We are encouraging members to select this method of payment as an alternative to PayPal as we do lose out on transaction fees – you can cancel your PayPal subscription and replace with a FPI or SO.

Can you also please remember to update me with any changes in your circumstances such as address, phone numbers and, in particular, email addresses AND make sure your next of kin have us listed as someone to contact ... when the time comes!

Should you be struggling to pay the subscriptions in these difficult economic times then please do contact me rather than just not pay – we can work something out.

Veterans and their families ought to be aware of the network of organisations out there that can offer help if required:

SSAFA	SSAFA, the Armed Forces charity
Help for Heroes	UK Armed Forces and military veterans charity Help For Heroes
Royal British Legion	Royal British Legion Armed Forces Charity
The Veterans Charity	https://careaftercombat.org

CROSSED THE BAR:

I am delighted to say that I have nothing to report in this Newsletter period, September, October & November.

NEW MEMBERS:

We welcome just the one new member.

James 'Jim' MacMillan Harper, joined the RN 09/07/74 and served through to 20/11/96. He served in Ajax 06/10/75 - 08/05/77 as REM1 and thus visited the Town of Ajax in 1976; and he is visiting again in 2026 with the Association. Jim & Christine live in East Kirkbride, South Lanarkshire.

Unfortunately, we had two resignations of Associates during this period.

BIRTHDAYS:

Following some feedback, I shall merely give birthday ages rather than actual dates – so happy birthday to the following crew members in the Newsletter period from September to November, inclusive:

CRUISER

Albert Robb	107
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FRIGATE

Robert Brook	71
Charles Poole	85
Eddie Greenslade	67
Ken Ward	78
Trevor Sharp	74
Chris Hall	66

Jeff Connolly	67
Jim Harper	69
Andrew Mitcham	63
Andy Daniel	71

Crew Members, if I have missed your birthday, please let me know. Thanks go to Peter Danks our 'Significant' Birthday Card writer & sender.

WELFARE & HEALTH UPDATES

As we all get older, bits wear out, stop working or just fall off, and I'm sure all of us of a certain age will have a litany of ailments of varying degrees of seriousness and varying amounts of tablets for breakfast. Should you have something in particular you would wish members to be aware of, then please let me know – I also know how to keep a secret if you just want to make me aware.

Albert Robb – Cruiser veteran Albert celebrated his 107th birthday in September and his granddaughter Viona reports that he's about the same, still between her mum's and his place but of late has seen an improvement in his general health – good to hear. Well done Albert.

Allan Lorrigan – our other Cruiser veteran. Son Howard reports both mum and dad are doing well and plodding along nicely. Allan was able to put me right on one aspect contained in the report of his 100th birthday in June and also had copied over a poem from 1944 – see separate article.

Gavin Collis – my son Gavin suffered a brain haemorrhage in August but is now recovering. He attended the Portsmouth Reunion and many there expressed their concern for him so by way of update; he appears to be well on the road to full recovery but is still signed off sick and cannot drive for now.

Unfortunately, we have several other members either recovering from, undergoing, or awaiting various medical procedures, or just Anno Domini catching up, and we send them all our very best wishes for a speedy recovery.

If anybody wants to make contact with any other member, let me know; I'm sure they will agree to me sharing their contact details, not forgetting WhatsApp direct messaging.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

The easiest way to pay your membership dues is by Standing Order or regular Faster Payment (FPI) through our bank and this is the preferred method. PayPal, which is on the Association's website, is another option, but we become liable for transaction fees. These methods automatically renew and saves you having to remember to do a transfer or send a cheque each year ... and will save me having to chase you, should you forget.

Annual subscriptions remain the same: £12 for individuals and £18 for families.

BANK DETAILS: HMS Ajax & RPVA (or River Plate Veterans Association)

ACCOUNT NUMBER: 24865868

SORT CODE 30-99-56

CHEQUES payable to **HMS Ajax & RPVA** and sent to me at:

Malcolm Collis, The Bewicks, Station Road, Ten Mile Bank, Norfolk, PE38 0EY.

I can then pay them in electronically on-line.

Please let me know if there are any changes to your address, phone number or email, so that I can keep the membership records up to date. Also contact me in cases of hardship.

Membership Secretary

Malcolm Collis h.m.s.ajax.rpv@gmail.com 01366 377945 +44 7717559594

ALAN PHILLIPS REMEMBERED

In the December 2024 Newsletter the sad passing of long-term Association member & Committee member, Alan Phillips, on 28th September, was reported and several of us attended his funeral in Guildford.

Alan's sister-law-law, Sandra Phillips, updated me on developments in Canada in the Town of Streetsville, Mississauga, where good friends, Judi & Peter live.

They emailed Sandra to say, "... When Alan died, we dedicated a plaque at our Legion above the bar in his memory.



But yesterday (27th October 2025) we drove down the Main Street of our village and the Legion has put a poster of Alan to recognize his Navy service and many other veterans, to thank them for their service. Thought you'd like to know; we miss him.



SURGEON COMMANDER ALEXANDER JAMES BURDEN FINAL UPDATE

Over the last two plus years there have been numerous exchanges of emails and regular progress updates have appeared in the Association's Newsletters (Back Copies available here - <https://www.hmsajax.org/newsletters>) regarding the restoration work by Andrea Valle, an Italian historian and collector of military memorabilia, particularly Royal Navy, of the uniform of Surgeon Lieutenant Alexander James Burden, who, among many other RN Ships, served in HMS Ajax at the Battle of the River Plate.

Andrea, who has a small museum in his home town in the Alps, which he has been curating for over 35 years, first contacted the Association in May 2023 as part of his researches regarding a gift from his wife of a uniform belonging to a Surgeon Lieutenant A. J. Burden, upon which his was carrying out a full restoration.

He finally completed his work in the summer of 2025 and a full account of his labours is now available on the website here - [Alexander James Burden _Inglese_](#) and gives a fascinating account of the life of this Naval Officer and is well worth a read.

He also pays tribute to the contribution of the Association's Archivist, member Lois Birrell (who as a genealogist tracked down the family), and the late member Alan Phillips (advisor on the medals). The Association applauds Andrea's work and his dedication.

Malcolm Collis



TOWN OF AJAX UNVEILS CROSSWALK

The Town of Ajax recently put out the below news release and the crosswalk will feature in the 2026 Association's visit.

News Release October 14, 2025

Town of Ajax unveils crosswalk in honour of Canada's Veterans

The Town of Ajax has unveiled a new crosswalk at Veterans' Point Garden, acknowledging the service and sacrifice of Canada's veterans.

The crosswalk was designed in collaboration with the Royal Canadian Legion Branch 322 and the images and colours used hold significant meaning. The white and red striped background represents Canada's national colours. Meanwhile, the outlines of the ship (HMS Ajax), plane and helmet represent the veterans who served in the army, navy and air force.

The crosswalk is intended to serve as a lasting symbol of remembrance in our community.

QUOTES

"As we approach Remembrance Day, I am pleased that Ajax can honour our veterans with a new crosswalk. The artwork depicts the Town's own unique military history, including the HMS Ajax and the Battle of the River Plate. We will forever be grateful for the sacrifices that were made then, and continue to be made today, to protect our rights and freedoms as Canadians." - Shaun Collier, Mayor and CEO, Town of Ajax

"On behalf of Royal Canadian Legion Branch 322, Ajax, this Veterans Crosswalk stands as a lasting tribute to those who served our nation. It reminds every citizen of their courage and sacrifice and reflects our community's commitment to honouring our veterans. Projects like this ensure their legacy continues for generations in our neighbourhood." – Bruce Sharpe, President, Royal Canadian Legion Branch 322

QUICK FACTS

The motion to create the Veteran's Crosswalk was introduced on February 18, 2025, and was unanimously supported by Ajax Council.

The colours and imagery used in the crosswalk hold significant meaning. The white and red striped background represents Canada's national colours. The ship (HMS Ajax), plane and helmet represent the veterans who served in the army, navy and air force.

The Battle of the River Plate, fought on December 13, 1939, had been the first major naval victory of the Allied forces in World War II. British cruisers HMS Ajax, HMS Exeter and HMS Achilles defeated the German pocket battleship, the Graf Spee. The Town of Ajax is named after the British cruiser "HMS Ajax" which served with distinction during World War II.



70TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE TOWN OF AJAX



2025 sees the 70th Anniversary of the incorporation of the Town which has launched a website celebrating its anniversary! The new website is a central hub for details surrounding the 70th anniversary.

Since its incorporation in 1955, Ajax has grown into a diverse community with a vibrant local economy. Residents are invited and encouraged to join in the celebrations over the course of the year and can find ways to mark the milestone on the website. The page features an interactive timeline of the history of Ajax, event details, special 70th anniversary walking and cycling maps and anniversary messages from community leaders.

Visit ajax.ca/ajax70 to learn more about how Ajax is celebrating 70 years!

On behalf of the Association both Chairman Nigel Masters & I have recorded anniversary best wishes which, along with a number of others can be found here - [Ajax 70th Anniversary - YouTube](#)

In my interview I made mention of my first trip out to Ajax in 2005 for the 50th, taking my father Joseph Collis [First Commission pre-war HMS Ajax] and my family out when granddaughter Molly, who was only three, at the parade through the streets, shouted out that she could see an elephant – don't be silly we said ... but she was right! The Town are looking for the archive footage!

On behalf of the HMS Ajax & River Plate Veterans Association we wish the Town all the very best and look forward for a continuing wonderful relationship.

Malcolm Collis

DIGITAL VETERAN CARD

Many of you will already have a Veteran Card which provides quick access to support services, discounts, and proof of service. It helps in accessing veterans' charities, NHS services, and local authority support like housing. The card also enables discounts on travel (It can be used to get a [Veteran's Railcard](#) for up to a third off rail travel in Great Britain although it costs £30 for one year – worth it if you use the trains a lot), retail, and dining, and serves as proof of service for employment initiatives. Most train operators and TfL offer free travel for Remembrance services to veterans and serving military.



A new Digital card was launched on 17th October 2025 allowing veterans to prove their service status using their smartphones. Currently only for use in person, the plan is to roll out to allow on-line transactions within the year.

As with the Blue Light Card scheme, you'll be amazed just how many retailers and providers offer discounts – not to be sniffed at!

You can currently only apply for a Veteran Card if you have a UK address. Veterans who do not have a UK address will be able to apply later this year. If you qualify but as yet do not have a Veterans Card, apply here <https://www.gov.uk/veteran-card/apply> - use the same link to upgrade to a Digital Card.

FROM NAVY ABBREVIATIONS TO LIBERATIONS

I must confess, I become somewhat confused with the plethora of navy abbreviations in general and rank/role in particular ... I thought the police were bad enough, but nothing like the navy!

Google sometimes helps, I no longer have Alan Phillips to turn to, but when abbreviations are duplicated, I sometimes revert to guessing!

I got it wrong in my report on Allan Lorrimer's 100th birthday report in the September 2025 Newsletter when I put him down as Leading Writer when it should have been Leading Wireman – apologies Allan. Google advises me; "A Wireman (L) in the Royal Navy, from 1943-1946, was a Wireman (an electrical trade within the Torpedo Branch) who was also a Leading Hand, indicated by the added letter 'L' on their trade badge, which featured an 'L' and a single horizontal torpedo design. This role existed during a transitional period before the formal creation of a distinct Electrical Branch.

Son Howard put me right on behalf of dad who said he was on Blue Watch, port side and began as E.A.'s mate (Electrical Artificer) and then on to 6" guns, 'Y' turret, looking after the switch board, interceptors etc. in fire control. He mentioned he was employed below decks for so long that when "Hookey" Rawlings (a commodore) inspected, he was singled out to spend some time above decks to recover. It was in this role that he took part in D-Day in Ajax.

Howard also copied in a poem which had been distributed to the crew about taking the surrender of the German Garrison on Santorini, and island north of Crete, on or around 17th October 1944.

The biography of the Ajax Captain at the time, (JOHN WILSON CUTHBERT CAPTAIN OF HMS AJAX from 8 SEPTEMBER 1944 to 19 MARCH 1946) sheds a little more light on the subject and explains some of the references in the poem.

Under his command the ship formed part of the liberation force that went to Greece in October 1944. The Island of Santorini, north of Crete, surrendered to Ajax. The boats were used by Commander R.S. Foster-Brown, RN, and S.M. Medley of the Hussars who took in the caique (Greek fishing boat) 'Santa Claus'. The German Garrison was rounded up and the shore party acted as real Santa Claus to the released prisoners-of-war. They distributed the mail which they had thoughtfully taken ashore with them in the caique. There were also presents for the islanders, including 30,000 tons of flour, 5,200 lbs of sugar, 1,850 lbs of butter and 2,600 lbs. of preserved meat.

THE GREAT LIBERATOR

When we first struck the island that's shaped like a horseshoe'
At first crack of dawn, the story of course you,
Know off by heart, how we met "Santa Claus",
And decided to land without any pause.

The Royal Marines in khaki and blue,
And 'Joey' R.M. wore a pistol or two,
They were going to accept the surrender of Jerry,
It was still very early so none were too merry.

But no-one as much as gave a small glance,
At our Commander, dressed fit for a dance,
He looked very smart, from cap down to gaiter,
For he was to be known as the "Great Liberator"

The Garrison Commander came forth with white flag,
"Ah" said the boys, "This is Der Tag",
"We've dreamed of this day for a very long time"
Then settled themselves for a three mile climb.

They arrived at the top midst many loud 'Zeeto's'
 What wouldn't they give for a bottle of vino,
 A crowd met them there, with many addresses,
 But where were the maidens with their soft caresses.

The Commander stood dumb while the Bishop gave speech,
 With his eyes on a lovely just out of his reach,
 This wasn't the welcome that he was expecting,
 He had hoped for some girls and some very nice necking.

He got his kiss, but not from some dame,
 A nice sort of kiss, but not quite the same,
 "My Great Liberator" cried Nicky the Greek,
 Then pounced on our Commander, and kissed both his cheeks.

"Come" said the Bishop, "Let's go for a wet,
 You don't want to take your prisoners just yet,
 You must be so thirsty after your climb"
 The Commander nudged 'Joey' and said "Gosh it's tot time".

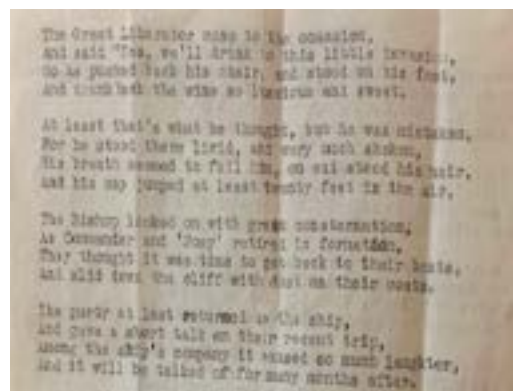
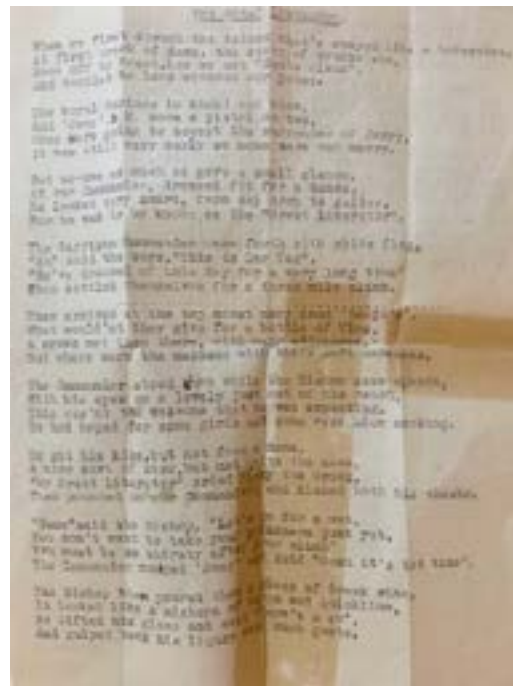
The Bishop then poured them a glass of Greek wine,
 It looked like a mixture of tarps and quicklime,
 He lifted his glass and said "Here's a go",
 And gulped back his liquor with much gusto'.

The Great Liberator rose to the occasion,
 And said "Yes, we'll drink to this little invasion,
 So he pushed back his chair, and stood on his feet,
 And drank back the wine so luscious and sweet.

At least that's what he thought, but he was mistaken,
 For he stood there livid, and very much shaken,
 His breath seemed to fail him, on end stood his hair,
 And his cap jumped at least twenty feet in the air.

The Bishop looked on with great consternation,
 As Commander and 'Joey' retired in formation,
 They thought it was time to get back to their boats,
 And slid down the cliff with dust on their coats.

The party at last returned to the ship,
 And gave a short talk on their recent trip,
 Among the ship's company it caused so much laughter,
 And it will be talked of for many months after.

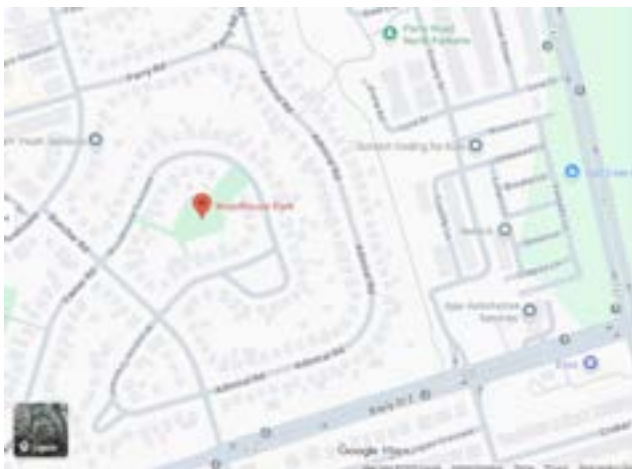


MEMBER VISIT TO AJAX

Granddaughter of Captain Woodhouse, member Louise Ashton & husband Richard, were in Canada in late September 2025 and called in to the Town of Ajax. Debbie Steer looked after them and they had a great day exploring the town and meeting up with several of the council members, and also spending the afternoon in the Town Hall looking at the Archives, etc.

Here, the frock coat of Captain Woodhouse, donated to the Town by Louise, on behalf of the Woodhouse family in 2021, is on display (another one went to the Naval Museum in Montevideo where Louise visited with the Association in 2019).

Louise and Richard also managed a visit to Woodhouse Park in the Town.



POLAR BEARS AND HMS AJAX

Following a rather strange exchange of emails between member Douglas Hadler (Ajax December 1966 to April 1968 Lieutenant RN) and myself, in which we managed to confuse ourselves, somehow, Douglas ended up viewing a YouTube link to a two minute video showing a mother polar bear jumping on a vehicle and then leading some rather brave sailors to a crevice somewhere in the frozen north where her cub had fallen down. Said sailors rigged up a system to hoist up the cub and all ends happily.

Douglas wondered if this was just an apocryphal tale included on the website as an extra, nothing to do with AJAX, but it would be nice to know if there is an actual connection. I hope I am not leading you on a wild goose/cub chase, he said.

I denied all knowledge of including this or any other video link in my emails apart to our website and the Reunion report – I suppose it could have been worse!

Intrigued, I searched YouTube and sure enough there were several clips of various cubs being rescued - some look as if they were AI fakes! Difficult to know what is and what isn't real nowadays!

The nearest I got off Google in reply to “polar bear hms ajax” was an AI reply confirming there was a link between Ajax and a bear!

“A battleship named HMS Ajax had a bear cub mascot named “Trotsky” in 1920, though it was a brown bear, not a polar bear. The Royal Navy had a history of keeping animal mascots, including bears. There is no information to suggest that any HMS *Ajax* had a polar bear specifically.

Details about the bear cub mascot “Trotsky”:

Ship: The bear served on the battleship HMS *Ajax* (1912).

Time: Trotsky was aboard during HMS *Ajax*'s commission in the Mediterranean and Black Sea in 1920, when it was involved in investigating the Bolshevik advance in the region.

Behaviour: The bear was reportedly kept in order by the ship's dog.

Later Life: At some point, Trotsky was transferred to the battleship HMS *Emperor of India*, according to one historical photo caption.

While an HMS *Ajax* had a bear mascot, other Royal Navy ships also kept bears of various species as mascots. For instance, the ship HMS *Amelia* adopted a black bear cub in British Columbia.

The Royal Navy's practice of keeping animal mascots, and specifically bears, was more common in the past, but the tradition has since ended. During WWII, for example, most of the larger or more dangerous animals kept at naval bases were put down to prevent their escape during bombing raids.

Whilst proof reading, Peter Danks added that a reindeer once came back in a submarine* and also the cat in HMS *Amethyst* was awarded the Dickens Medal, he believes**

[* Wikipedia states - HMS *Trident*, during much of her time in the north Atlantic, the submarine had a young reindeer doe on board. It had been presented as an unexpected gift by the Russians in August 1941 as part of the diplomatic ceremonies to honour the alliance between Russia and Britain. The Reindeer was named Pollyanna after the base and apparently adapted so well to life on board (being fed table scraps and condensed milk) to the point that she ate a few navigation maps. When the submarine returned to the UK Pollyanna had grown to the extent that the services of the local slaughterman had to be used to truss her securely so she could be safely removed from the boat. Pollyanna then proceeded to live out the rest of her days in a local zoo, bobbing her head three times whenever she heard a whistle, as was her military training.

[**Google AI reliably tells us that – ‘the ship's cat, Simon, of the HMS *Amethyst* was awarded the PDSA Dickin Medal, the highest honour for animals in military service. Simon is the only cat to have received this medal, which was awarded posthumously in 1949 for his bravery and service during the Yangtze Incident. He was a hero for his role in keeping the crew's food supplies safe from rats after the ship was shelled and stranded.’]



**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. The 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 Lear 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 journey 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>



CENOTAPH PARADE SUNDAY 9TH NOVEMBER 2025 AND OTHER EVENTS

Following the success of last year's parade, the Association registered once again for the 2025 London Cenotaph Remembrance Day.

As per last year, our Chairman and Standard Bearer felt it necessary to scope the area out a few days in advance, a reconnaissance party to assess any security risks. This mainly involved visiting licensed premises and the Union Jack Club, however they did briefly find themselves drafted back to their first ship HMS Belfast, where, down in the galley they reminisced over politely telling crew, 'Just one ***** sausage'!

The main group that were staying over, arrived on Saturday 8th November and were booked in to the Premier Inn, Southwark, Bankside. In contrast to last year at the very quiet Smithfields area, we found ourselves steps away from the bustling Borough Market.



Offering plenty of dining and drinking options, everyone eventually met in The Anchor, a pub next door to the hotel.

After a relatively early night, we mustered in the hotel foyer at 0830hrs and set off, resplendent in blazers, ties, berets and gongs. Free travel on the tube, the staff opening the gates for the many veterans making their way to Charing Cross. We then followed the masses into the Mall and Horse Guards.

I made my way to the organisers tent to collect our identification badges (A46), which assist the media in picking out groups during the march, the remainder went off to find our meeting point and the breakfast truck. The Premier Inn group were joined by Terry Herbert, Barry Champion and Douglas Hadler who had made their own way in, swelling our numbers to fifteen.

There began a long period of standing around as thousands of veterans chattered, looking out for old faces, exchanging dits (stories) and hip flasks. Yes, Rum for breakfast!

Sometime after 10am, the columns formed up and began to proceed through the Arch into Whitehall, it was a loose amble as opposed to a march.

The senior service of course, were first out and reserved a very warm welcome for the Royal Air Force as they marched by into position with a strong rendition of the Dambusters music. All taken in good spirits.

This year we had a guest among the Association ranks with Robert Masters, son of Nigel, marching alongside his Dad. Robert was an Army Logistic Corps veteran with tours of Afghanistan. A very proud moment for the Masters' family.

As 11am fast approached, a hush descended down Whitehall and with the chime of Big Ben, an impeccably observed two minutes silence was observed. This was time to reflect on the reason why we were all there, remembering all those that laid down their lives for our freedom. With the Last Post, it was a very emotional silence standing to attention as the only movement was the golden leaves falling in the glorious autumn sunshine.

The service commenced with King Charles at the head of proceedings and the customary laying of wreaths followed.

Then, it was time for the veterans to march and in no time at all, we were underway. In lines of six, we marched down Whitehall, HMS Blake ahead of us and HMS Lowestoft to the rear (they actually joined our 3rd row as there was only three of them).

The march can be a bit of a blur, naturally blinkered straight ahead and trying to stay in step, but with the band playing and crowds cheering, it goes by in a flash. Nigel gave the 'eyes left' as we passed the cenotaph and handed in our association wreath. Down Whitehall and right wheel into Great George Street, large crowds in the sunshine as we headed towards Horse Guards Road.

Earlier that morning, while we were eating our breakfast rolls on the parade ground, our family members had claimed their viewing position in St James Park and had unfurled a large HMS Ajax & River Plate Veterans Association flag over the railings placed on Horse Guards Road. This section of the march is where everyone is a bit more relaxed and heads turn to look for family and waves and cheers are given. We spotted the flag as soon as we turned the corner, what a great sight. We later learnt that every Naval group and association ahead of us had cheered on seeing the Ajax flag, our ladies, children and the flag receiving lots of attention.

Before finishing back at the parade ground, a command of 'eyes right' to the dais and the figure of Prince Edward who this year, took the salute.

We dismissed back on the parade ground and a few group photos were taken before heading off for lunch. After last year, our resident Londoner Paul Byrne was banned from giving directions, so it was just a successful twenty minute wander to Mayfair and The Goat Tavern.

Appropriately, the venue where Lord Nelson met Lady Hamilton; the manager Juris looked after us during a well-received lunch service. A few liquid refreshments were taken and before we knew it, the evening had arrived and it was time to part ways with some and for the remainder to head back to Bankside and the Thames.

After a long day, some retired to their rooms, the hardy bunch finishing the weekend back in The Anchor. Monday morning, everyone said their goodbyes and departed to all points of the UK.

Another successful Remembrance parade weekend came to a close.

Eighty years on from the end of the second world war, just 20 veterans of that conflict were there to parade.

Lest we forget.

(More Photos and video can be found here <https://www.hmsajax.org/2025-events>)



Reading the first lesson on board Spirit of Adventure, Saga Ship, Remembrance service. 21:15

Remembrance Services were held elsewhere, both on Remembrance Sunday and on the 11th. Peter Danks didn't make London as he was off on one of his frequent cruises but did manage to become involved in the on-board service on the Spirit of Adventure

Honorary Association member George Stewart posted this well deserved Royal British Legion recognition on our Whatsapp Group. We met George during our 2019 Association trip to Uruguay. One event was to visit the Montevideo Silver River Masonic Lodge Hall [Río de la Plata,

called the River Plate in English; Plata translates as Silver], with historical connections to HMS Ajax from the time several Cruiser crew visited. George had instigated and facilitated the visit: he was also the most generous barman, with several members imbibing more than a tot or three ... and probably outstaying their welcome!



The Ambassador of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
Mal Green,
presents this recognition to
George Stewart
Standard Bearer

in sincere appreciation for your worthy and constant collaboration through
many years in the commemoration of the Remembrance Day.

Your dedication and support have significantly contributed to keep alive the
memory of those who gave their lives in service for peace and liberty.

In the name of the Government and the People of the United Kingdom, we express our most
profound appreciation and gratitude.

Montevideo, 11 of November 2025



Besides taking part in the Cenotaph March, our Standard Bearer Mike
Fox was back in Portland in time to parade our Standard at the
Remembrance Day Parade.

ARCHIVIST REPORT DECEMBER 2025

MICHAEL BLACK and JIM QUINN

I was contacted by Monica Black, back in August, as she and her husband were on holiday in Toronto and wished to visit the Memorial Wall in Ajax to pay her respects to two of her Scottish relatives, Michael Black & Jim Quinn, both of whom served in Ajax at the River Plate. She had picked up from our website that the Wall was being renovated and was checking that it was still viewable.

I confirmed there is a M J Black and J Quinn on the Memorial that the Panel updates only applied to the list for the Ajax Frigate. I advised that for M J Black I have listed just for 1939 which covers the Battle of the River Plate and there is a Black Drive in the Town of Ajax named in his honour. For J Quinn I have him listed between 1939 and 1942 inclusive, but without a street name.

I also offered to arrange something with the Town ... until she told me the visit was to be the next day!

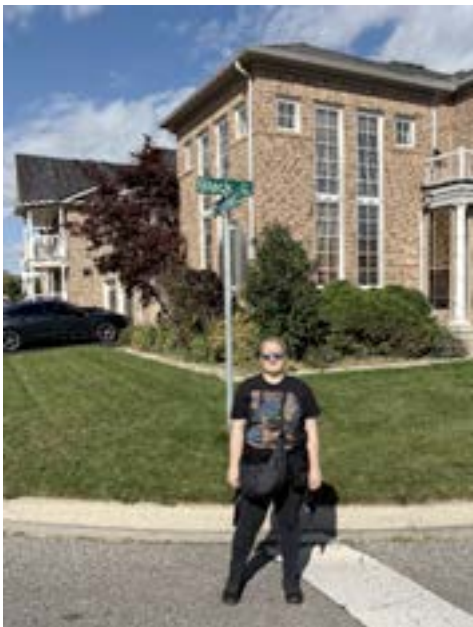
I asked her for a little more background information that I shared with the Town; she came back with -

“Michael Black was my paternal grandfather’s older brother, my great uncle. My family believe he may have been an officer on the ship. My aunt said she’s seen a photo somewhere of him escorting the Queen around a ship which must have been post-war. After the war he married Margaret, emigrated to Rhode Island, USA and had four children.

Jim Quinn was my paternal grandmother’s younger brother, another of my great uncles. He got into the navy early as he really wanted to sign up, and my great grandmother had to give her permission for this. He was apparently known to be good looking, very tall and she was worried he would get into mischief. He was later on Russian convoy ships, taking supplies to Murmansk/ Archangel after a German siege. After the war he worked on laying transatlantic tele cables. He married May, lived in Manchester, UK and sadly died young, very suddenly of a heart attack.

My aunt said that the story goes that everyone knew that the Battle of River Plate was going to happen, it was worldwide news, and the only way families knew of fatalities was if their son’s name was in the newspaper. My great grandmother Quinn was at the newspaper shop every morning before it opened to get one. Friends and neighbours also kept track as they knew about Jim, and that she was desperate to hear any news.

We don’t believe they knew each other on board, and it’s a strange coincidence that Michael’s brother later married Jim’s sister after the war. I believe those that fought in the Battle of the River Plate would’ve been invited to the parade in Westminster, London, presided over by Churchill, the admiralty and the royal family.



Interestingly, while he didn’t serve on the HMS Ajax or in the navy, my maternal grandfather, Joseph McCambridge, served in the army with Canadians during WW2 and received a Canadian war pension until he died in the late 1980s. I believe after the war at one time he was also offered the option to relocate to Ontario, and a guaranteed job and a house there, but my grandmother, Peg, had just had their first child during the war and they decided to stay in Scotland with a young family. He worked as a shipbuilder and truck driver in Glasgow, Scotland post-war, and had four children, who went on to have ten grandchildren including me.

He didn’t serve on the HMS Ajax but my paternal grandfather and Michael’s brother, William Black, joined the merchant navy as a gunner. I understand he survived several torpedoed ships, including on one occasion being marooned with other survivors in a lifeboat for more than a week before being rescued

near the Cape of Good Hope. His shell shock went undiagnosed in the South African field hospital the survivors were sent to, the whole experience was so harrowing that it stayed with him all his life, although he spoke little of it. He went on to marry Margaret and live in Glasgow, Scotland, had five children, who in turn had nine grandchildren. I never met either of my grandfathers or my great uncles as they died before I was born, but I am incredibly proud of their service. Thank you for connecting me more to my family's history."

After the visit, Monica came back to me; "Thanks again Malcolm, we visited the wall and garden this morning and we think we found the correct street.

My family were very happy to hear the details that you were able to confirm regarding the service records. Thanks both (Susan in Ajax), really appreciate your assistance and information. Back in the UK now getting over the jet lag. Kind regards, Monica

CYRIL PARRY

Simon Parry contacted me after information regarding his grandfather Cyril Parry who was at the River Plate.

Unfortunately, there is no Cyril Parry listed as serving in Ajax at any time during the war. I have William Edward Parry and a P W Parry, both serving in HMS Achilles, and a D J Parry in HMS Exeter, all three at the River Plate December 1939., and that's it.

I requested more information on his grandfather so I can do some more digging, but await a reply

TOM WOOD

Member Jo Wilson messaged me enquiring on behalf of a friend regarding a Tom Wood and whether there was a street in Ajax in his honour. Tom was born in 1926 [Probably not as he would have only been thirteen at the time of the River Plate and he enlisted at the age of 15!] and lived in Walkers Street in Sneinton, Nottingham.

I have a T. A. Wood listed, (the only 'T' out of the 8 Wood's) Ajax 1939 to 1943.

With the rest of the Wood's he is assigned to Woodchester Green in the Town of Ajax.

JULIETA FRÈRE

A slightly unusual enquiry entitled 'HMS Ajax logbook - September 1939', was received from Julieta Frère, a maritime archaeologist based in Argentina, currently a PhD fellow in the National Scientific and Technical Research Council (CONICET).

"I am reaching out to inquire about the 1939 episode between HMS Ajax and SS Olinda (in Rio de la Plata area). I have found really interesting and moving testimonies at your website. I am particularly interested in the coordinates where the Olinda was last seen, therefore I wanted to ask you if you have this information or might have a copy of the HMS Ajax logbook.

This information would be extremely helpful, as I will soon be embarking on the research vessel Falkor (Schmidt Ocean Institute) together with my colleague from Uruguay, Dr. Rodrigo Torres. We aim to map several historical shipwrecks in the area through MBES and backscatter data. Knowing the degree of precision of the existing coordinates, to combine with our dataset, would greatly help in conducting a more informed survey."

I responded, "Sounds like an exciting adventure. Unfortunately, all I have in terms of a "log" is a diary from an unknown source in my archives and which is on our website, but this does not help in narrowing down the final location of the Olinda.

"3/9/39 On patrol off Brazil; intercepted the German freighters OLINDA & CARL FRITZEN between Rio Grande do Sul & Plate estuary 3 hours after the declaration of war. Both ships scuttled to avoid capture"

Looking on google maps, Rio Grande do Sul appears to be a state over 600km long and 250km from the Rio de la Plata, so not much help to you at all.

I organised a HMS Ajax & River Plate Veterans Association trip to the region in 2019 and in Uruguay, one of the highlights was sailing with the Uruguay Navy out to the scuttle site of the Graf Spee. In Buenos Aires we met up with the Graf Spee Association and formed a friendship with General Enrique Dick, a professor, historian & author of note.

No help at all I'm afraid but I wish you luck in your quest. I would appreciate hearing of any successes you may have."

Julieta replied, “Many thanks for your kind reply and for sharing this information. I can only imagine how moving must have been to travel again to the region and be in touch with Graf Spee site, which is an important point in Río de la Plata naval history. I will keep you posted if I get any data. Best regards, Julieta”

WILFRED AUBREY RUSSELL

I was contacted by Julie Jamieson, granddaughter of Wilfred Russell, a Royal Marine in HMS Exeter at the time of the River Plate. He was one of the casualties who later died on the Falklands just after the Battle.

Her reason for contacting me was to draw my attention to the signed Union Flag, housed in the Portsmouth Naval Museum, that was dropped into the Makasser camp in Indonesia by an Australian plane as the war ended. Although her grandad died well before then, she was still very moved to see something connected to the survivors of the ship that he had served on.

I responded that I was aware but only thanks to the TV coverage surrounding VJ Day and in fact I had included it in our recent (September 2025) Newsletter which I forwarded a copy to Julie. I also advised that I had copied the exchange to the Town of Ajax for their information - they may contact you for more information for their records.

I drew her attention to the fact that the Town of Ajax in Ontario is named after HMS Ajax and most of the streets are named after crew from the three ships at the River Plate [Exeter, Ajax & Achilles]; although for some reason there is no Russell Street. His name, however, does appear of the Memorial Wall at Veterans Point in the Town - have a look at the sixth panel here www.hmsajax.org/wall-panels - Julie was unaware of the Ontario connection.

After this year's memorial service at the Normandy Memorial Wall in Southsea, I was approached by a lady and we got chatting – turned out to be Julie, who later emailed me to say, “Thank you so much Malcolm. It was so lovely to be there with you all on Saturday, a small connection to my Grandad I never met just heard about. It was a special event and I found it moving.”

THOMAS ARTHUR NUNN – HMS AJAX 1938 - 1942

The granddaughter of Thomas Arthur Nunn (C/MX 47560), Romany Chapman, copied to me his photograph album of his time in the Second Commission of HMS Ajax, up to the start of the War.

The Itinerary I have has a large gap between the second recommissioning and short refit at Portsmouth on 11th January 1938 when she joined the America & West Indies Squadron, and arriving at Valparaiso, Chile in the following January 1939, (24th to 29th). Here, together with HMS Exeter, she rendered aid to the victims of the terrible earthquake in Concepción in Chile.

From the dated photographs I can place Ajax as follows:

July 1938 Barbados

July 1938 Trinidad

July or August 1938 Crossed the Line in the Atlantic

August 1938 Sao Sebastiao, Brazil

September 1938 Punta del Este & Montevideo, Uruguay

November 1938 Buenos Aires, Argentina

Calling at Ingenieros White & Bahia Blanca, Argentina

November & December 1938 Falklands

Christmas 1938 Punta Arenas, Chile

The website has been suitably updated.

Malcolm Collis

Archivist



