

Lt Cdr The Reverend John Davies RN 1927-2025

My grandfather was master of a sailing ship until his eldest son went overboard in a South Atlantic gale in 1896. My father served in the army throughout the Great War, my mother as a nurse. I was born in 1927 shortly before the Great Depression. It was a time of uncertainty – Communism, Spain, Mussolini and Hitler. When war came the family lived at Wallasey, opposite Liverpool, and were bombed out in 1940. After Dunkirk my father became a Reader with the army and the family joined him at Taunton. The following Easter I went to Dartmouth as a cadet and was evacuated to Eaton Hall when BRNC Dartmouth was bombed. Vacations in my last year were spent with the Liverpool Escort Force.

As a Midshipman I joined the battleship Duke of York which became flagship of the British Pacific Fleet, present at the Japanese surrender and at Hong Kong.

Victory Japan

After sinking the Scharnhorst the battleship Duke of York refitted at Liverpool where I joined her in January 1945. She was named after the King who came to see us off. I was given his cap: the Queen saw it under my arm and came to chat. At Malta for VE Day, then to Australia and up to Manus island, near Papua New Guinea, where Admiral Sir Bruce Fraser joined and we became Flagship of the British Pacific Fleet. Prince Philip was First Lieutenant of HMS Whelp, a destroyer of our escort. We heard that the atomic bombs had been dropped. My action station was in the Bridge Plotting Room, at cruising stations I was there on my own with two ratings. Through the door was the admiral's bridge. He often looked in - called me Laddie. Someone had lent him a Rolls Royce for use in Australia. The Flag Lieutenant said they played Liar Dice to decide who cleaned it.

We then sailed to Guam the forward naval base where Admiral Fraser invested the American Fleet Admiral Nimitz with the GCB. It was a big occasion, the Americans were introduced to Splicing the Main Brace. That evening we heard the Japanese were ready to surrender, which led to a party in the gunroom – the Admiral and Captain came.

After a few days in harbour, while the admirals conferred, we sailed towards Japan. Admiral Fraser was to sign on behalf of the British Empire. There was lots of diplomatic traffic so I was transferred to the Cypher Office. It was hot and sweaty, I soon got Impetigo and had to come out. Japan accepted the Allied terms. We met the American Third Fleet and spent the Sunday steaming through the largest fleet the world has ever seen. On Tuesday there was a massed fly-past over the fleet; two thousand planes. Japan was having difficulty in finding people to sign, so it was a week later that we formed up astern of the American battleships Missouri and Iowa and headed for Japan.

The ship went to action stations. I was sent to the Air Defence Position, above the bridge, to give a running commentary. Two small Japanese came aboard, a pilot and interpreter, quaking in their boots, escorted by our giant Sergeant-Major. They passed their charts and information to the captain, Angus Nichol. When they had gone from the bridge he burst into laughter - are these the people we have been fighting? We anchored in Sagami Wan, the bay outside. Boats were lowered in case of frogmen. A destroyer's boat, close inshore, saw two men waving wildly. They were British prisoners of war who had escaped and saw the White Ensign – the first to be free. In the morning we weighed anchor, went into Tokyo Bay and anchored off Yokosuka next to Missouri. Midshipmen's instruction continued that morning.

VJ Day, Sunday 2nd September 1945. The surrender was signed on the forecastle of USS Missouri at nine o'clock. Ceremonial Sunset was impressive. Flags of the United Nations flew from every halyard in the ship, The Royal Marine Band and buglers played Sunset as flags were hauled down. We invited Ensigns from the Missouri in the evening. They had been warned not to drink, so we had a sober evening watching a film on the quarterdeck.

Admiral Fraser was popular with midshipmen: I was one of a bunch he invited to accompany him on a day ashore. In the Australian destroyer Warramunga we went ten miles up the bay to Yokohama the port of Tokyo and there he left us to our own devices. Most of the Japanese ignored us but some were friendly. I climbed

one of the buildings still standing, families were sheltering in the ruins. I took a couple of photos, atomic bombs could not have done more damage.

Impetigo returned, I was back in sick bay. We called briefly at Okinawa, then on to Hong Kong for the surrender the following day. We were there nearly two weeks. A Japanese destroyer sank while serving as a mark for a sailing race. Early one morning we were drifting down the straits still secured to the mooring buoy. An anchor was dropped and a tug took us back. A typhoon caused many ships to go to sea. We sailed for Manila and a call on General MacArthur, then on to Australia and victory celebrations.

Fifteen years later I was again in Japan and went to Kyoto to see the Japanese war memorial. A large statue of the Buddha stood by a temple. The main hall was lined with miniature gilt filing cabinets containing cards with the names of those killed in the Pacific war, Japanese and Allied. The inscription in Japanese and English read:

**IN MEMORIUM
THE WORLD'S UNKNOWN SOLDIER
KILLED IN
WORLD WAR II**

All honor to him, friend or foe,
Who fought and died for his country!

May the tragedy of his supreme
Sacrifice bring to us, the living
Enlightenment and inspiration; Fill
us with ever-mounting zeal

For the all-compelling quest of peace,
World peace and universal brotherhood.

Following a victory celebration in Tasmania I was taken ill and landed at the derelict penal settlement of Port Arthur and taken back to Hobart. The ship arranged a funeral, just in case, a kidney was removed and I was there till Christmas recovering. An Aircraft Carrier took me to Sydney for survey, then home, arriving in cold wet February. My father was still in Germany, my mother not well: she died six months later of Cancer. I sailed home from Kiel in a "Windfall" yacht. On another visit to Kiel I had a weekend in Berlin



HMS Duke of York



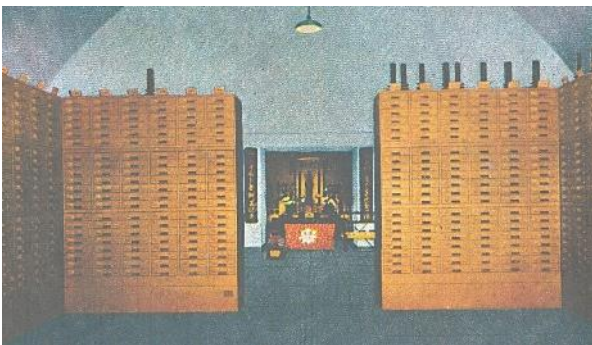
Japanese surrender on board USS Missouri



Midshipman. Victory Parade, Hobart



Hiroshima



Japanese War Memorial. Kyoto



Buddha, Kyoto



Princess Elizabeth inspecting John's division

After Sub Lieutenants' courses I went to HMS Chequers, leader of the 1st Destroyer Flotilla in the Mediterranean for two and a half years, Prince Philip was First Lieutenant in the last year. I was sent to Londonderry as Captain of a Fairmile ML, and married Anne while doing the Long TAS Course. After Peter was born Anne joined me in Malta. For eighteen months I was on the staff of Flag Officer Flotillas Mediterranean. Back at Harwich I was Captain of a Coastal Minesweeper. In 1956 my father died of Parkinson's, Michael was born, and Nasser nationalised the Suez Canal. From Sheerness I sailed in a thunderstorm for Malta.

The crisis went cold: Anne joined me with a baby and a toddler. She had hardly arrived when I was sent to patrol round Cyprus. It was there that I got orders for Suez. After rendezvousing with the invasion fleet, with two other minesweepers, I escorted the landing craft into the beach then took the Diving Team and Port Control party into Port Said. Hostilities ended suddenly. A new minesweeper limped in on one engine: I was told to change ships and take her to Malta. There was a major fire and she was towed 800 miles to Malta. At last I had some time with Anne and the boys while repairs were done and new engines fitted.

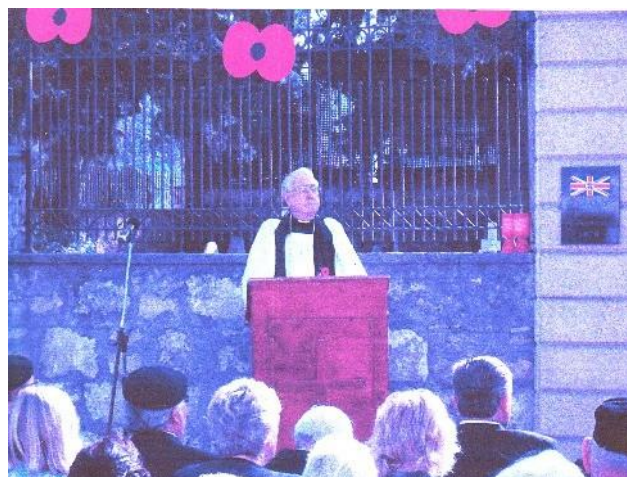
After sailing for UK I joined HMS Vernon for Sea Trials of new mine countermeasures equipment. Richard was born and I went to the Far East as First Lieutenant of a frigate. The captain was a New Zealand fighter pilot, the engineer somewhat disgruntled. He had married and resigned: he had no wish to be in the Far East. The ship was mainly alone on missions in the Pacific and Indian Oceans: the last trip included a trip to Japan. I visited Kyoto to see the Japanese war memorial, a large statue of the Buddha and a temple containing miniature gilt cabinets small cards, each with the name of someone who had died in the Pacific war including American, British and Allied – the only memorial I had seen honouring the enemy - calling for world peace and brotherhood. On the way back to Singapore she called at Hong Kong and rammed a minesweeper while berthing. The Captain was Court Marshalled, but the fault was in the engine room.

I went home to be First Lieutenant of HMS Vernon, staff of Commodore Ships, then Naval Liaison Officer at GCHQ Cheltenham. I gave notice of retirement. The Director gave me a farewell lunch and I joined Ripon Hall Oxford that evening in October 1967. With a small group I read for the Bachelor of Divinity degree as an external student of Kings College London, and was the only one to pass the examination at the end of the year. The College could not run to individual tuition so academic input was from Oxford University. I was free to attend any lectures or tutorials in theology or philosophy. This was a great opportunity to hear the leading lights of the day of all denominations, not always relevant to my exam. The result came when I was already curate of the city church of Oxford. The church tower contained a striking example of the Church Militant, Archbishop Cranmer, main author of the Book of Common Prayer and two other bishops had been incarcerated before being burnt at the stake. In the pulpit John Wesley had preached on becoming a Fellow of Lincoln College. In 1973 I went to Windsor as Team Vicar and chaplain to the Guards, then Rector of Hagley, near Birmingham. My final appointment was to the staff of Exeter diocese combined with Vicar of Littleham. In 1992 I retired to Topsham dividing my time between assistance in local parishes, sailing and locums in Cyprus and the Gulf. Anne's loss of memory was noticed in Kuwait, the following year Alzheimer's was diagnosed. She continued to accompany me to Kyrenia for some years, but I then cared for her at home assisted by Richard. She died in 2013. Kyrenia was then without a chaplain on their centenary: I went for four months. The church had been extended and a hall built to the design of a Muslim architect, all denominations were welcome and services were held in Turkish, Russian and for African students. On Remembrance Sunday a service was held outside the British cemetery, the road closed and chairs provided by the Council. I made friends with the Mufti who gave me a copy of the Qur'an, which explained that Muslims regarded Jesus as a great prophet but not himself God, so they rejected the Holy Trinity.

Coming home I had several problems, including a slight stroke which affected my speech. In 2018 I moved to the Abbeyfield home in Exmouth, where Anne had once been Chairman. Leading a small group for University of the Third Age, we looked at Christianity and other faiths. Richard Holloway, Bishop of Edinburgh and Primate of Scotland, had resigned because he did not believe much of what his church taught – but still believed in Jesus. A book by John Saxbee, recently retired as Bishop of Lincoln, entitled "No Faith in Religion" saw Religion as the necessary rules and practices for running an organisation which should not take precedence over Faith in Jesus whose death and sacrifice was to establish his New Covenant of Love.



St Andrews Church, Kyrenia



Remembrance Service, St Andrew's Church, Kyrenia



John Davies