

THE *MENESTHEUS* 'FLOATING BREWERY': A HISTORY OF THE SHIP AND BREWERY

GEOFF DYE

Introduction

A great deal has been written on the war-time floating brewery that was located in HMS *Menestheus*. However, more information has recently come to light including a manuscript written by Allan N. Cabot, M.N. Chief Officer of the vessel. This article has been adapted from his unpublished work and has been further enhanced by the authors own research.

In September 1993 the Brewery History Society visited Gales brewery in Horndean, Hampshire. A lecture was given by J.F. Walker and K.E.J. Morison, the latter being the second brewer on board *Menestheus*, and a film was also shown of the brewery, taken when the ship was being decommissioned.

The opportunity to make the film made was a story in itself as a request was made to the Admiralty, but was refused. The film company had turned up on the dock, presented the original request letter and were allowed on board. Later in the day the Admiralty sent a letter to the docks forbidding the filming, but it had already been completed. A copy of the film is held at the Imperial War Museum, London. This is the story of the ship and those who worked on board.

The origins of the *Menestheus*

It has often been thought that the *Menestheus* was the first floating brewery, yet an article in the *Brewers' Journal*, published on 15 February 1924, mentions that the North German Lloyd steamer, *Stuttgart*, had arrived at Plymouth on 9 February 1924 equipped with a plant

capable of brewing 8,000 litres of beer. This ship was sailing on its maiden voyage to New York, later to be part of the 'Strength through joy' program instigated by Adolf Hitler. So although it may not have been the first, the German ship would be small fry compared to the *Menestheus*.

In April 1945, in an answer to a question in the House of Commons from the Honourable R.N.V.R. Member of Parliament, W.W. Astor, the First Lord, Mr A.V. Alexander, stated

The fleet is to have an amenities ship which will contain a combined theatre (350 seats), cinema, canteen, Naafi shops, restaurants, library, reading rooms, tailors, boot repairs, brewery, 12 bed hospital and ice cream plant.

This idea was a direct order from the Prime Minister, Sir Winston Churchill, and consisted of a number of vessels that were to be converted to amenity ships as part of the fleet train to sail to outposts of the Pacific area. The original ships chosen were the *Menestheus*, *Agamemnon*, *Argus* and an unnamed seaplane carrier. It was also proposed that Wrens were to be based on board and to have two shore based mobile breweries, but the former idea was dropped.

Subsequent proposals were scaled back to just two ships, both ex-Blue Funnel vessels that had been requisitioned earlier in the war and were on mine laying duties. The first, *Menestheus*, was built in the Caledon yard in Dundee, Scotland in 1929, and registered in Liverpool at 7,494 tons for Ocean Steam Ship Co. Ltd. It was one of the fastest vessels of the time powered by Burmeister and Wain twin engines with a sea speed of



Figure 1. The Menestheus.

16 knots and, after the refit, its weight increased to 11,000 tons. The second ship was the *Agamemmon*, a sister ship from the Blue Funnel fleet.

Originally Watson Lamb, a brewer with John Smiths of Tadcaster, and Rodney Head of Watneys were allocated to *Menestheus*; George Brown of Truman's, Burton and Ken Morison brewer of Hancocks, Cardiff, to *Agamemmon*; and Arnold Essex of Samuel Smiths, Tadcaster, plus another unnamed brewer, to the shore based brewery. Ken Morison was an interesting man and records his experiences on an audio tape now held in the Imperial War Museum. His first memories of the Hancocks brewery were when he and his mother were shown around the site at a young age by the then head brewer who later was to become his stepfather. After leaving Swansea Grammar school he started working at the brewery, training to become a brewer. He eventually qualified and became a member of the Institute of

Brewing. In the Second World War he served in the Fleet Air Arm and flew Swordfishes from aircraft carriers and out of Gibraltar.

Some thought was put into how to brew on a moving ship and an Admiralty committee approached the Institute of Brewers. This was passed onto George Seton, the General Manager of George Adlam and Sons, well known brewery fitters of Bristol. He remembered the system devised and operated by Stephen Clarke's, a pressure fermentation system used during the earlier part of the war. A call was made to Clarke at Coopers brewery in Southampton who made some calculations and within an hour came back with some ideas on how it could be done. The Admiralty approved the design after a visit to the Southampton brewery where they were taken on a tour and a tasting of some samples. Orders were then given for the plants to be built on both ships.

***Menestheus* sails for Canada**

Originally the work was to be carried out in the dockyards of Avonmouth, but due to the lack of space and labour it was decided to undertake the conversion in Canada. The plant was manufactured in the U.K. and was almost immediately nicknamed 'The Davy Jones Brewery'. It was capable of brewing 1,800 gallons of beer six days a week (Sunday was a day off for religious reasons.)

The breweries were to have six untrained hands, six Chinese cleaners and be managed by Trumans brewery, Burton upon Trent, under Lieut. Commander George Brown who was the assistant brewer at Burton. Notes from Ken Morison show that he was summoned in mid 1945 to an interview in London with Lance McMullen, Binny (Barclay Perkins) and Dr Oliver (Briant and Harman consulting chemists) and was informed about the project (by that time the scheme had already commenced and the *Menestheus* was being converted in Canada).

On the cancellation of most of the project, after Japan's surrender, *Menestheus* was chosen as the only ship to be worked on; the brewing plant being supplied by George Adlams of Bristol and the refrigeration system by J. & E. Hall. Some work had already started on *Agamemnon* and Brown and Morison were transferred to *Menestheus*. Over the life of the latter ship it was cursed by numerous fires, accidents and delays, but her main claim to fame was as an amenity ship with a floating brewery. The ship entertained an estimated 48,000 personnel during its voyages.

During late November 1944 Allan N. Cabot, a serving Merchant Naval Officer, returned from duty in the trans-Atlantic for leave. After a week at home he was called into the company's Liverpool office and told about the amenity ship program. Six senior personnel including two chief officers, two chief and two second engineers had been selected to travel to Vancouver, British Columbia to look after the company's interest. The two ships were both to sail together under the Red Ensign and as such had to be brought up to the standards of the Classification Society, the official body that established and maintains ships' standards.

On 14 December 1944 all the officers sailed from Liverpool for Halifax, Nova Scotia on the Elder and

Fyffe vessel *Cavina*. This old ship was a refrigerated vessel and had 60 other passengers, all being conveyed to Canada. On a dull and wintry day early in 1945 at noon the vessel arrived and they were given a meal before boarding a train for Montreal. Once clear of the capital the train was less crowded and on arrival at Winnipeg the group was able to stretch their legs on the platform at a temperature of minus 40 degrees. On the journey the train developed a fault and the arrival in Vancouver was some 12 hours late, finally pulling in on 3 January 1945 at about 6.00pm. The second engineer and Cabot were allocated a two bedroom suite on the upper floor of the Sylvia Court hotel overlooking the bay.

After a few days the *Agamemnon* left with some of the officers for Victoria with the Canadian Pacific Ferry. Cabot was summoned to meet Davidson of Dodwell and Company and presented with a document confirming he was the shipping master and a set of Articles of Agreement. He was signed on as Master, an almost unique position as although it was a naval ship it was not intended to be a fighting vessel and was sailing under the Red Ensign. On board were both Merchant Navy and Royal Navy personnel.

On 18 January 1945 *Menestheus* was towed into False Creek where she lay for the best part of a year being refitted by West Coast Shipbuilders. Cabot and the Second Engineer were on hand whilst the refit took place and periodically the former also had to visit the *Agamemnon* in Victoria to assess progress. Early in February 1945 both men were sent on a course to learn the Sperry Gyro Compass as that was being fitted to the ship.

The main items of the conversion included accommodation for 100 Merchant Navy personnel, 180 Naval personnel, a concert hall, shopping centre, chapel, store rooms and supporting areas. It also had a hospital and medical centre and, of course, the brewery and bar. During the work an extra deck was built, prefabricated in four sections and installed by crane. During the refit a fresh water distilling plant was situated in the Number 3 lower hold and capable of distilling 300 tons of fresh water per day, enough for the whole ship and other ships as well. There were also six other small distillation plants in operation making drinking water.

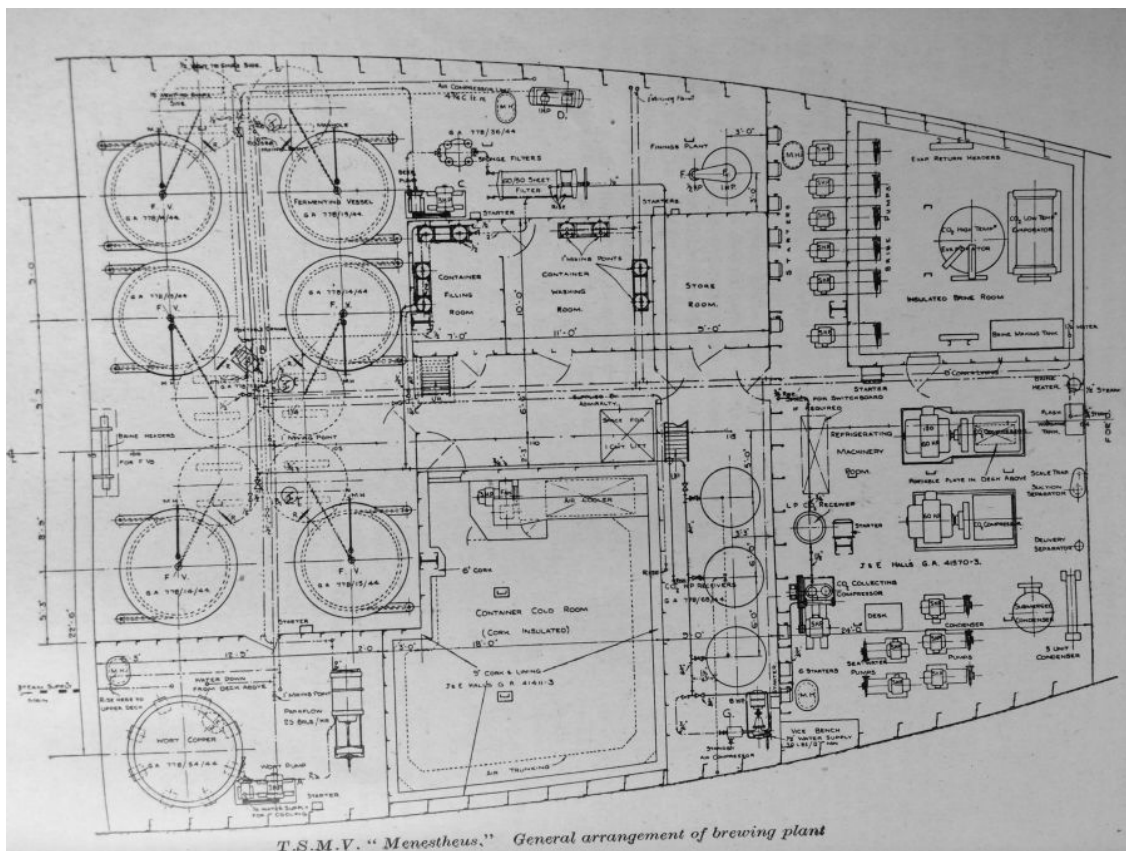


Figure 2. A plan of the brewing plant on board the Menestheus.

The operation of the brewery

As previously stated the brewing system chosen was Stephen Tower Clarke's Pressure Fermentation System. This had been devised by him after his brewery in Southampton (Coopers) had suffered extensive damage in 1940 due to Nazi bombing raids. Most of the fermentation rooms had been destroyed, however the enclosed bottled beer conditioning tanks had survived. Without fermentation capacity he had a problem; however he came up with an excellent idea which can best be described as half way between a Burton Union fermentation and the modern continuous fermentation system. The conditioning tanks were used to ferment the wort with an enclosed small tank above. Under pressure the yeast would rise and pass into the small tank where it remained. Below the beer would be mostly yeast free. Clarke had adapted what was left of his brewer's plant for just under £200 and brewed with it for the rest of the war.

As the vessels were enclosed this was excellent for brewing on a ship - the beer in an open vessel would slop about. The process on board used malt extract supplied in five gallon drums (70 lbs weight) from E.D.M.E. Ltd. of Mistley and Paines of St. Neots. This was chosen due not only to storage problems, but also the ease of operation and the need for one less brewing vessel (the mash tun). The hop concentrate was supplied by White and Tompkins of London. The brewery was fitted on board in an area 76 feet long, 59 feet tapering to 47 feet wide and only nine feet high. Clarke and George Seaton spent a great deal of time designing how to fit the brewery into such a small area, but excelled at the final result.

The EDME syrup process had been developed by R.E. Essery, R. Gane and T.N. Morris, researchers at the universities of Birmingham and Cambridge. Essery and his colleagues had discovered that if alcoholic liquors were

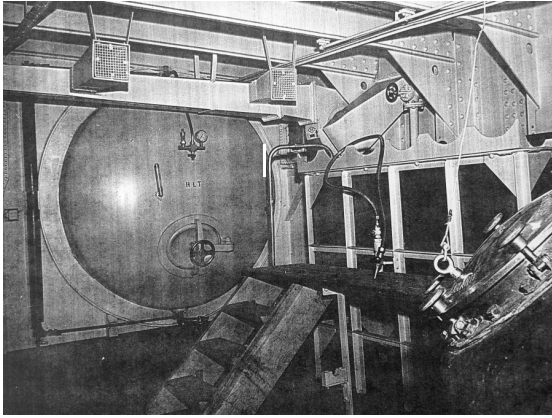


Figure 3. Copper showing cramped conditions.

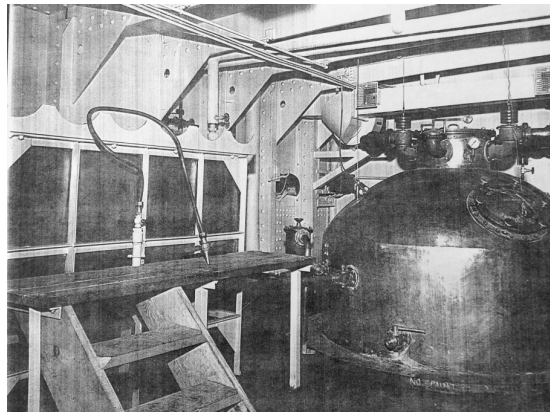


Figure 4. Pressure copper.

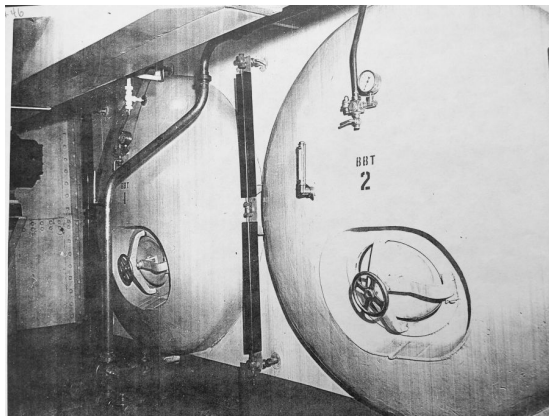


Figure 5. Storage vessels.

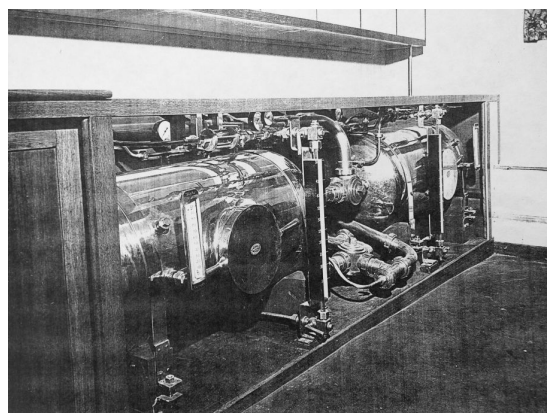


Figure 6. Sea water distillation plant.

chilled below 0 degrees the ice formed could be separated from the remaining liquid by centrifuge. They had taken fined beer brewed in Cambridge, kept it frozen in tins for six days at twelve degrees, and then centrifuged at 4,000 r.p.m for 20 seconds. The concentrated liquid, when diluted, was found to be sound and very close to the original beer. The vitamin content was the same, but some samples threw a sediment. The beer decided upon for *Menestheus* was a Mild ale of 1037 degrees and 50% Lovibond with an attenuation of 90% and quickly gained the nickname of 'Davy Jones Ale'.

As there was no mash tun a small dissolving tank was used where the distilled liquor was 'Burtonisation'. One ton of malt extract was mixed with treated distilled sea water and transferred to the 55 barrel pressure wort cop-

per and made up to the 55 barrel length. During the boil the wort was passed through a cylinder containing 7 lbs of hop concentrate, excess steam being vented via the dummy funnel fitted to the ship when it was modified. After the boil the hopped wort was then passed through the A.P.V. Paraflow refrigerator and into one of the six fermentation vessels where it was pitched with 30 lbs of yeast. These vessels contained a rouser propeller and pressure was maintained at seven P.S.I to allow the barm to run back and any extra CO₂ was collected, scrubbed and reused.

After six days finings were added and two days later the beer chilled to 32 degrees. It was then transferred to a bright beer tank and served under counter pressure in the bars direct from the tanks. Some of the beer was also

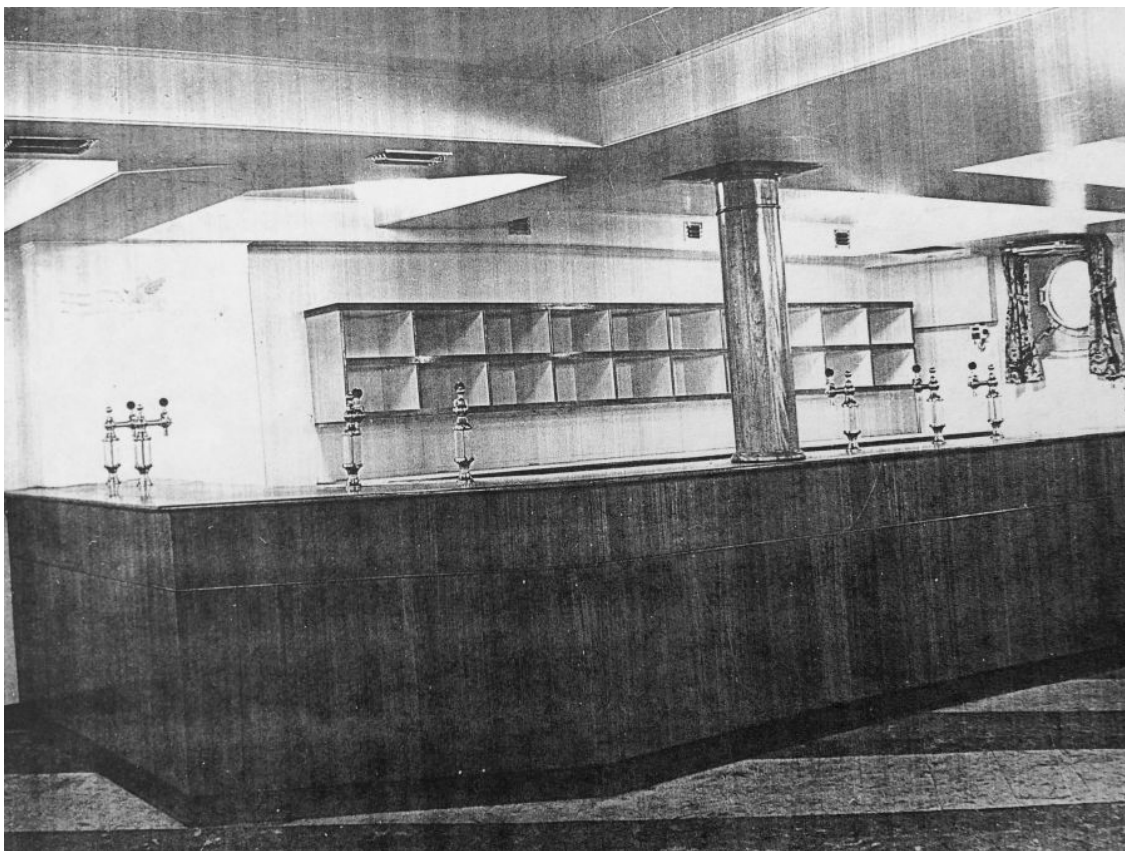


Figure 7. The bar.

kegged in the 1,200, five gallon kegs the ship carried and stored at 40 degrees. The filling of these kegs was carried out using the bottom hole after CO₂ had been run into the clean empty keg. As the beer went in the bottom, CO₂ was purged from the top and was vented via the dummy funnel. Steam from the ship's boilers were used to heat the copper and for cleaning the small kegs. The yeast used was a strain called Guinness Number 2 and had been chosen after yeast from several London breweries had been tested to ferment samples of the test brew. The plant on board had a finings making facility where sturgeon fish were processed and later used to clarify the brew. The brewery was very compact and was built into Number 4 lower hold and capable of making 1,000 gallons of beer per day. A miniature brewery was also fitted to keep the yeast alive between brews and was set between deck in the storeroom. In the bars beer was dispensed via ten taps similar to those on today's bars, that is a 'T' font high above the bar counter.

One of the design faults was that the pipe from the brewery to the bar ran up behind a bulkhead immediately behind the altar in the chapel and sometimes beer made an awful gurgling noise as it passed through. This often happened during a service and prompted the Padre to burst out 'I'll kill that bloody brewer' part way into his sermon.

An instruction sheet/advert was handed out on the keeping of the beer for other ships that took it in kegs. It was recommended that the containers should be stood upright and a tool was provided to remove the tinfoil seal from both outlets. A tap was inserted into the lower outlet, with instructions to press it in and give a quarter turn to the left to lock. Likewise the top was treated the same. To remove beer the lower tap was opened and then after a couple of pints the top tap. When not serving the top tap should be closed. The beer should be served at 52 degrees and the container returned prompt-

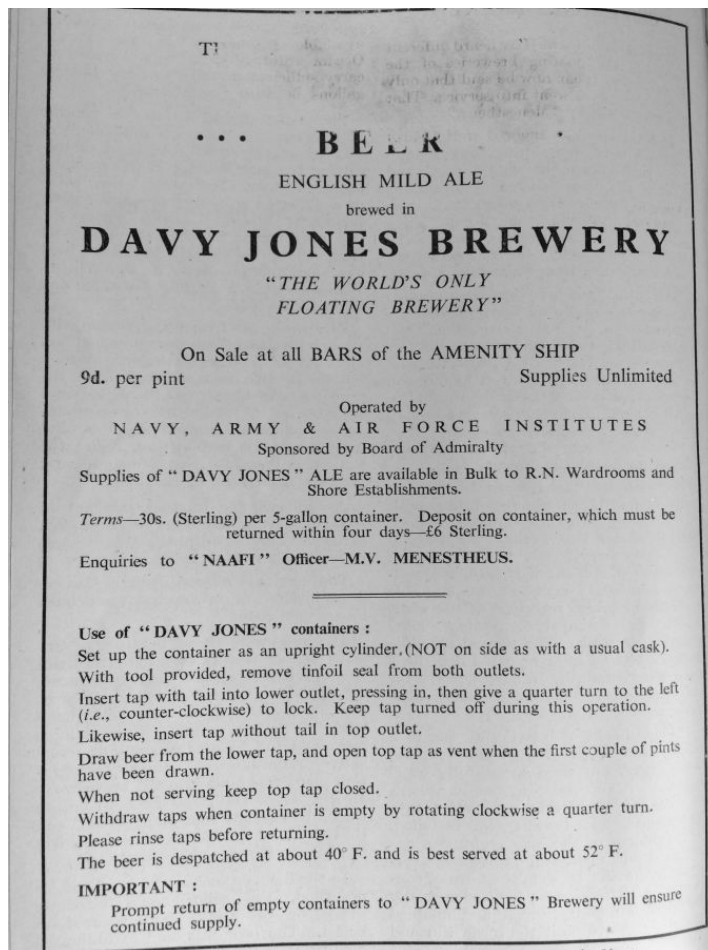


Figure 8. The instruction sheet describing how to keep the beer.

ly to ensure further supplies (maximum four days). The beer was sold to other ships at 30/- per 5 gallon keg (£1.50 in decimal) with a deposit on the container of £6. The kegs were fitted with Barnes Patent valves and the total weekly production gave 250 barrels capacity.

Equipping the ship

Elsewhere on board was a 350 seat concert hall with stage and film facilities. There was also a chapel to hold 50, a twelve bed hospital, a swimming pool and an amenity space for the 17 strong Marine Band under the direction of Ted Talling. Each of the musicians could play four to six instruments.

Once the hold had been cleared of old ballast 1,700 tons of pig iron was loaded for stability purposes. Cleaning the fresh water tanks was a long task whilst the oil fuel tanks had accumulated some six inches of sludge. On the upper decks a 'Union Melt' machine was used to weld upper sections.

In early May 1945 Victory in Europe occurred and many ships were diverted to the Far East. At this time a review was undertaken regarding whether both ships were needed. This took several months and in the meantime various carpenters and other crew members started to arrive. Early in November 1945 the concert party for *Agamemnon*, arrived in Vancouver and put on a show at the Orpheum Theatre, called 'Tokyo Express'. It was a

great success, but a few days later it was decided to cancel work on *Agamemnon* and return it to the UK. She sailed at the end of November incomplete, was decommissioned in the UK and returned to the Blue Funnel Line.

By the middle of December 1945 most of the work on the *Menestheus* had been completed and all the Naval personnel had arrived; it was ready to move on to Burrard Drydock for final checks.

Leaving False Creek

On 12 December 1945 *Menestheus* left False Creek with the aid of four tugs and, under the pilotage of Captain Park, she cleared the Burrard Bridge with less than two feet of clearance. The 460 foot hull had a gleaming new white coat of paint and the funnels were buff. (a second funnel had been added serving little purpose, it was just for show!). On arrival at North Vancouver the hull was inspected in dry dock and the bottom scraped and new paint applied. Then the ship was towed across Burrard Inlet to Lapointe Pier where the interior sections were finished, including the brewery plant. On the exterior a floating crane, a signal mast and a main topmast was put back in place with the necessary rigging. Empire stevedoring company loaded the malt extract cans and stores. A test brew took place in Vancouver on 31 December 1945 and another on 8 January 1946. Finally the ship was ready to sail. The new Master appointed was P. Purkis with A.N. Cabot now 1st mate and C.E. Ash 2nd mate.

Early in January 1946 the new Captain arrived in Vancouver and the ship was finally handed over on 28 January 1946, Cabot becoming Chief Officer. At that time *Agamemnon* was well on the way back to England under the command of Captain Dark.

The ship sails from Vancouver, fully fitted, for Yokohama, Japan

During 4 and 5 February it underwent engine trials which were successful and on 6 February at 3pm set sail, docking in Victoria at noon so that the local population could view the ship. Next day the main engines broke down and sailing was delayed. Also on 7

February the propeller was fouled by a wire, but the next evening it finally departed. A southerly course was set and the ship arrived at the entrance to Tokyo Bay at daylight on 27 February, anchoring outside the breakwater off Yokohama.

On the other side of the outer breakwater was the British Cruiser *Aurora*, the flagship of the Eastern Section, which seemed to be expecting its arrival. Captain Purkis went ashore to see the United States Navy Control, but the Americans, who controlled the harbour, refused to let the *Menestheus* in. However, it was explained to them that the ship needed quiet waters for brewing and without it there would be no beer and thus no party and they would certainly not be invited to use the other facilities! After reconsidering for just a few moments they saw the error of their ways and the next morning the ship berthed alongside Hatoba, Yokohama.

Soon afterwards a launch from *Aurora* arrived demanding to know why they were not allowed to berth, but *Menestheus* was. Once the facts were known there was a complete about face and some of the crew were the first visitors to the *Menestheus*. Unknown to the Americans a mini brew had taken place in secret before arriving - a case of one over the American Navy by the Royal Navy. Surprisingly the first brew was reported as similar to a German lager and the proof beer generated in the process of keeping the yeast alive was about 28% alcohol. Once the main brew, which took ten days, was ready it was stored in the five gallon kegs and also served in the bar.

The ship was greatly appreciated by the Americans and other visitors and on the final evening a special party was organised for the U.S. High Command. The ship's concert party, lead by Ronnie Hill, had actors taking on both male and female roles with the Marine band providing the music.

On 12 March 1946 the ship left Yokohama escorted by HMS *Cossack* on route for Kure via the Inland Sea.

Yokohama to Kure

After two days, passing Shimo Misaki, south of the island of Shikoku, and through Bungo Suido, the ship skirted a multitude of small islands and into Kure

Harbour. This was a former Japanese Naval Base and closest port to Hiroshima. HMS *Duke of York* was in port and the *Menestheus* was invited to berth alongside, pontoon fenders being lowered to make boarding easier. By now the paint on her hull had become rather rusty. 17 seamen from *Menestheus* were detailed to paint it with red lead, a thankless task, but the next day the commander of the *Duke* sent 100 of his seamen to help - no doubt lured by the beer and facilities. However, this did not last and the job was only partly completed, (it was finally finished in Shanghai). As the city had been devastated by the atomic bomb there was little to do off ship. The American Forces in control allowed workers from the city to come aboard to undertake some tasks, but they were not to be fed - food was sent over each lunchtime. The Americans allowed some of the ship's company to go ashore and help themselves to stores in the warehouse. Out of the pickings a large consignment of brass screws was removed which later proved a ready source of cash in Hong Kong.

Cabot arranged with the Americans to get a day pass for him and 50 crew members to go ashore and travel by train to Hiroshima, about ten miles away. Train 607 left Kure at 09.22 hours on 19 March and on arrival the party was amazed at the devastation. The station had been repaired, but outside, where the famous bridge had been, there were shadow marks in the concrete. An area about four miles square was flat except for shells of buildings, the concrete had been burnt off the sides, all around was the smell of death. The party looked around for souvenirs in the debris, but only found a few melted nails and a block of spectacles melted all together. The party spent some four hours and returned to the ship traumatised.

Just before the ship was due to leave Kure H.M.S. *Belfast* arrived (now moored on the Thames). Here the *Menestheus* had the pleasure of entertaining Admiral Servaes and his staff on board. It was also at Kure that Lieut. John V. Haddock joined the ship on 9 April 1946. He recalls meeting one of the Royal Navy entertainment party members at the time, Sub. Lieutenant Jonny Hewer, who later became famous in the 1970s as 'Captain Birds Eye', advertising fish fingers on television. Haddock recollects in his memoirs that on the day he joined the ship he was amazed to see the facilities it offered; not only was the accommodation quarters excellent, but also there was plenty of space below

decks with the metal bulkheads and deckheads covered, electric clocks on the bulkheads and no expense spared on furnishings. Visiting service personnel had their own accommodation - separate from the Royal Navy party, ship's officers and crew - in their own wardroom. There were Chief and Petty officers mess rooms and a separate Sergeants mess, also one for other ratings. He recalls at the time there was a complement of about 180 personnel on board, including some civilians, and about 60 seamen ratings. He also remembers there was even a room where voice recordings could be made, transferred to record and sent home. Also, of course, were the theatre, cinema, swimming pool, hospital, soda fountains, the bar, and the brewery. In the indoor theatre shows were normally held over a two hour period and of West End quality. The 17 piece band under E. Talling played topical numbers such as 'Sleepy Lagoon' and other Pacific type tunes. On the days when the ship was open to visitors the amenities were available from 14.00 to 17.00 hours and then 18.00 to 22.00 hours. The mornings were spent preparing for the afternoon and evening sessions.

Many high ranking officers, including many from the United States Forces, were entertained, including Admiral Lord Fraser Commander in Chief of the British Pacific fleet. The Americans were especially enthusiastic and one Admiral commented, 'We have nothing like this in the U.S. Navy'. When guests were received it was via a large double accommodation ladder on each side and Quartermasters were on duty to welcome and record visitors both coming and going.

Kure to Shanghai

On 15 April at 7am the *Menestheus* sailed for Shanghai by special request from Admiral Bruce Fraser. The passage was made through the Western section of the Japanese Inland Sea and then via the Shimonoseki Straits past Nagasaki (where the second atomic bomb was dropped). After two days the ship anchored off Woosung Bar and on high tide travelled up the river past numerous junks, sampans, cargo ships, and navy vessels from many countries. The ship tied up on the north side of the river and the Chinese mooring party neatly coiled the heaving lines and promptly exited with them never to be seen again. The brewery went back into action and began to build up stocks of beer.

On Easter Sunday, 21 April 1946, a great party was thrown on board - over 400 guests were invited including the Senior Chinese Naval Officer, the Senior United States Army Officer and the British Consul General. The show performed was entitled: A Topical Tropical Revue 'Pacific Show Boat', presented by The Royal Navy. An extract from Captain Purkis's ship's log shows how well the gathering went

There were cards out for 400, but due to the usual gate-crashers this increased to some 460 persons. The Substantial pontoon was out and the Commander in Chief came aboard at 5.15 pm with his staff and began an inspection of the ship finishing at 6 pm in the cafeteria he began welcoming guests.

Captain Purkis describes the Admiral as

a man of great charm and personality , a strong man, with a strong personality, a red tanned face and steely blue eyes which never seem to move in their sockets but are watchful at all times.

This was observed by the Chief Officer on two separate occasions that even when his back was turned and in conversation he addressed the Captain without turning his head.

The Shanghai party cost a fortune and the Admiralty was asked to pay for it which they refused. After explaining that it was for the Americans it was finally paid. The ironic thing was that the Americans were so thrilled with the ship that they offered to purchase it for one million pounds.

The Chief Officer was never one for these large occasions and was in his room when, at about 8pm, a Naval messenger arrived with a note requesting his presence. On turning out in full uniform he was complimented on doing a good job and running the ship on only 17 deck-hands.

Shanghai to Hong Kong

The ship left Shanghai on 28 April and after four days arrived at the dockyard in Hong Kong. Laying in still waters the brewery was in action again to regain stocks and over the next ten days was opened up to some 1,000 servicemen to take advantage of the ship's facilities,

especially the theatre shows. The day before departure, in the absence of the Master, a party was held which included Admiral Fraser, Rear Admiral Archer, Vice Admiral Edelsten, and the Governor of Hong Kong, Sir Mark Young. The *China Daily Tribune* reported on the show and praised Ronny Hill, the producer. The origins of this show date back to a production at the Lyric Theatre, London where it was performed on 10 December 1945. It had been seen by some 45,000 men in Europe, but had not been put on in the Far East. A special version had been instigated for the first ship showing in Vancouver.

Before setting sail again a dozen or so civilian passengers were taken aboard who had previously been prisoners of the Japanese. It was reported that they were overwhelmed by the facilities available after several years of bad treatment.

Hong Kong to Seletar

The next destination was Seletar Singapore Naval base where the ship arrived after being escorted up the Johor Strait. There Lord Louis Mountbatten and his staff were entertained on board. The Lord looked very tired and rather ill; this was just prior to his appointment as Viceroy of India. On Friday and Saturday, 3 and 4 May, the theatre put on another performance of 'Pacific Show Boat' for the visit of task force 77. It was here the last brew took place on 12 May 1946 at a gravity of 1037 degrees, described as a mild, carbonated with its own gas and kept at 40 degrees. The next day the ship sailed again, this time for Trincomalee, the Ceylon Naval base. The final brew was to last the journey home.

Trincomalee to Aden and Suez

After a brief stop at Trincomalee and leaving at midnight on 31 May, a call had been suggested for Colombo, but was cancelled so the ship was ordered to go to Aden. The northeast monsoon season had started with short showers and sunny days. Whilst approaching Socotra a distress call was received from the *Empire Nile*, but nearer ships were able to deal with it so the *Menestheus* sailed on. Everybody was relieved as the weather had become rather rough. The ship arrived at Aden at 5pm on 9 June and was due just to refuel.

However, an unofficial visit was arranged for a few V.I.P.'s lasting only about four hours. On the 14 June at 5am the Suez Canal was reached and the ship entered it at noon the same day. Passage through the waterway took some twelve hours with a brief stay in Port Said. It was always a relief to pass clear of the canal zone as it was an area that contained many mines.

Port Said to Malta

The ship arrived at Valletta, Malta at 9am on 18 June 1946, an event marred by the suicide of one of the Navy ratings on board. The harbour had by this time been cleared of the numerous wrecks and the ship anchored in the main harbour. On the second night of being in port a dinner party was arranged for principle Navy officers many of whom were elderly Admirals about to retire. It was in Malta that numerous servicemen were entertained before repatriation to the U.K. The stay in Valletta was a memorable and happy time with fine weather.

Malta to Portsmouth via Gibraltar

Setting sail again a brief call was made at Gibraltar, arriving at 5pm and staying only some five and a half hours. The ship was ordered to Portsmouth to discharge all Navy personnel. Sailing through the Bay of Biscay it was very calm and a pilot was met as the ship neared British waters for the trip through the Solent from the Needles. Here a collision nearly took place with a yacht. Despite numerous blasts of the whistle the yacht's owner refused to budge, an avoiding course was taken and the ship ran aground striking a shingle patch close to the Southwest Shingles Buoy at 11am. With a fast falling tide the ship was well and truly grounded. Salvage tugs were sent for and arrived quite quickly. At 7.15pm with one tug pulling on the stern, the ship came free and arrived off Spithead at 10pm, berthing in Portsmouth the next day. Here most of the crew and civilians disembarked.

The final run, Portsmouth to Hebburn on Tyne

Leaving Portsmouth without the Navy Party at 4pm on 29 June 1946 the ship headed for the Tyne and arrived

at 6.30am on 1 July. This was its berth for the next few months as the brewery was taken out and the ship returned to the state it was in when requisitioned. Before the brewery was removed the famous film was made showing the brewery plant and how it operated. Drydocking showed no damage from the grounding and when the work was completed the ship was returned to the Blue Funnel Line. The brewery plant was acquired for resale by George Cohen Sons & Company of Wood Lane, London W12 and sold at a public auction in London. It was purchased by a scrap dealer who sold a lot of the equipment on to the John J. Calder brewery in Scotland.

Back in service with the Blue Funnel Line

When the ship was returned to its owners in 1948 it sailed in the China trade without any mishaps until 25 July 1948 when a fire started. Two seamen were overcome before a search party located the blaze in the cork insulation of the vessel's refrigeration system. At the time she was moored just outside Los Angeles Harbor on route from Jamaica to Pacific ports. The Harbor authority permitted the ship to be warped into berth 51 where the city firemen helped the crew control the fire. Repairs were carried out, but after only two years she suffered another fire in the Caribbean. In 1953 she became famous again. Extracts from the memoirs of the 1st electrician, Bill Blenkinsopp read as follows:

The Menestheus had left Balboa Panama on the 5th April 1953 and the vessel was heading for Los Angeles with a cargo of 4,500 tons of coal, rice and automobiles. There was to be a stop at Cortina Nicaragua. Whilst entering the harbour with a local Pilot at the controls the ship went aground due to language problems, him not speaking English and the crew not speaking Spanish. However with the skill of the crew and the power from the engine room port was made. On leaving the port the first indication something was amiss was when Mr Benkinsopp was informed in his cabin by a junior engineer that the engine room was on fire. The time recorded was 11.45 pm on the 15th April 1953. He quickly dressed and went aft down the starboard alleyway to the engine room to investigate. On arrival flames were already over the main engine heads and into the upper engine room casing. Fire alarms began to sound and the doors were closed on the engine room as the fire took hold. It was reported that the fire had started during the starting of the number 1 auxiliary engine when a fuel tank burst. (Blue Funnel engineers always

had problems with these Burmeister & Wain engines). At about midnight on the 15/16th April 1953 a large explosion amidships in the engine room ripped open the vessel and cloaked her in flames. Her position was 560 miles south and east of Los Angeles and 70 miles off Baja California's Magdalena Bay.

Within an hour Captain Thomas Walker gave the order to abandon ship and 81 crewmen and two passengers took to the lifeboats. A few hours later another ship, the *Navajo Victory*, reached the scene and took aboard survivors. The Captain contacted the ship's agents at Long Beach and they arranged for a tug which arrived after three days. It was another two days before a line could be attached to her stern after the fire was put under control. On boarding they found the ship's cat 'Minnie' was still alive but her paws were burned. The ship was towed to Los Angeles arriving on 5 May 1953. However, that was not the end as five more fires occurred in Port. The vessel was sold as scrap to the Boston Iron and Metal Company, Baltimore, a sad end to a unique ship.

Stephen Clarke's Pressure Fermentation system lives on

After the Southampton brewery ceased brewing Stephen Clarke had become head brewer of Crowleys of Alton and the new owners, Watneys, installed extra fermentation vessels using this system in 1950. These additional fermenters, constructed in concrete and Ebon lined, were in use at the Alton brewery until it ceased brewing in August 1970. It is understood that Peter Maulden later also used the system at his brewery in Ballingdon as well as in some other breweries abroad.

After the war Stephen Clarke applied for an award from the Admiralty for the work he had done in designing the brewery and training the staff, but the Admiralty dismissed his application. He then submitted it to the Royal Commission for Awards to Inventors. At the hearing the Crown's solicitor revealed that the Admiralty would contest the claim on the grounds that it was not used in war time, only afterwards, and that he had assistance from George Seton and advice from others. A disappointed Clarke withdrew his application.

It is interesting to note that whilst the author of this article worked at Courage brewery Alton in the early 1970s

I was intrigued to see in our empty yard that we had small kegs arriving from ships. I always wondered where they came from with their strange bottom and top openings. All the current ships kegs at the time were five gallon with the single hole sankey type fittings. After discovering internal photographs of the *Menestheus* found at Crowley's brewery when it closed I realised the kegs were being returned after all those years from Navy ships stores! The deposits on the containers were not refunded. These kegs and the *Menestheus* have all long gone as have all the brewing history in Alton. (except for the still derelict brewery of the Manor park, see a previous article in *Brewery History*, number 176, 2018). It may be that in some brewery somewhere the original equipment lives on.

Dedication

This article is dedicated to Stephen Towers Clarke and Allan Cabot - without the former there would have been no brewery and without the latter few memories. Also to Ken Morison, the brewer on board, who wrote an article on the brewery and gave an excellent talk at Gales.

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