

# A Just Retribution

By Rob Lynde

The two "Baddies" in this tale are typical of men all over the world who use their personal strength or their position in society to subjugate lesser mortals. They have no moral conscience and are just as much terrorists as the modern concept of the word.

I joined the MV Essex in 1940 after doing my stint on the training ship Vindictrix, as a deck boy. I quickly learned that a deck boy was a "Gofer" or called at sea a "Peggy". This name apparently used since days of the Tall Ships, and came from the word Peg leg, as describing men who had lost a leg or part thereof and were fitted with a replacement wooden stump. These men were employed to perform menial tasks on sailing ships, as were deck boys.

The deck crew consisted of a mixture Welsh, Scot, Geordie, Yorkshire and Cockney and their different dialects when all were excitedly talking was not unlike a babble from another planet. They all seemed to understand each other, but if I was unable to comprehend, there was one man who would translate for me. His name was Phillip Bames, though nobody ever called him by that name, as in the usual way of the sea, he had been applied a nick-name, and that was Bomber. He had the dubious distinction of being one of the first casualties of war, having been a Pilot in the R.A.F. and being shot down before Xmas 1939. As he had parachuted into the sea the enemy had done their best to kill him by machine-gunning him, but he survived and was picked up by a Naval craft. He spent 6 months in hospital and was then discharged as medically unfit, through well placed contacts in the N.Z. Shipping Company he joined the Merchant Navy.

This man spoke in a cultured voice the like of which I had only heard on the radio. He was a good seaman and had no aspirations to become an Officer, Mate or Captain; he was quite happy on deck. Most of the men respected him for who he was, and were not fazed by the knowledge of his obviously better education and upbringing, and they were soon to learn that he could handle difficult situations with complete aplomb

One particular Able Seaman would often try to goad Bomber by making snide remarks within his hearing, but the object of his harassment chose to completely ignore the big man, thus annoying his tormentor even more. His name was Gus Tyson.

I learned fast, I had to! My jobs took me all over the ship and the Bosun made sure I was not still for long.

Part of my duties were to keep the mess room clean, wash the mess deck, empty ashtrays, clean the toilets etc., Then there would be the errands for the men, i.e., "Hey Peggy, go below and get me a packet of fags from my locker", or "Peggy, give the cook a hand", "Peggy, give chippy a hand, but make sure the watches get their cocoa" and so on.

Gus, who was really at odds with Bomber, was a, very big man, and perhaps because he could not upset Bomber, he started to treat me as if I were his personal servant, especially at meal times, when I would hear "Peggy, bring me my tea" I would dutifully fill his mug and take it to where he sat (mostly alone). After half finishing the mug he would again call for me to fill it up again. This went on for four or five days, then one day when the evening meal was well under way, the familiar raucous voice called out above the babble of voices, "Peggy, bring my tea". I jumped up to do as I was bid when the dulcet tones of Bomber floated across the room, "Peggy, you don't have to do that you know". Gus Tilson glared down the room to where Bomber sat, looking at me. "Since when does a bloody poof tell the Peggy what he should and shouldn't do" he roared.

The whole mess room immediately became strangely silent, red as a beetroot I grabbed Gus's mug and hurriedly filled and returned it. I had barely sat down when Gus yelled again, "Peggy, fill my mug". Again the room fell silent as Bomber's words, clear as a bell came across the room, "You are not his or

anyone's servant, you do not have to do that". Gus, red faced and furious sprang to his feet and bellowed, "Keep your effing trap shut you motherless poof", he believed his size and weight would be enough to convince Bomber he was treading on dangerous ground, but was soon proved wrong as Bomber, moving with lightening speed came in from behind Gus, grabbed a handful of his hair pulling his head right back with one hand and bringing his other hand up in a karate chop to the neck with such a force as to make every man in the mess room wince.

I had witnessed the first of the two acts for which I will always remember Bomber. Incidentally Gus Tilson was paid off in Halifax, Nova Scotia, with what was called - an unusually severe throat infection.

## Part.2.

Stanley Travis was our Second Mate and he firmly believed he should have been the First Officer of the Essex. His bearing and manner of speaking were akin to Lord and Master addressing peasants. He was always dressed impeccably, his whites snowy white, the creases knife sharp, and his cap worn at the correct angle, would have satisfied any Sergeant Major in a Guards Regiment.

It was inevitable that Bomber and the Second Officer would clash. The Second Officer had a nasty habit of standing very close to the man on the wheel, especially in a heavy swell, to watch if the helmsman drifted off course for more than a second or two. A heavy swell coming in from any quarter makes it difficult enough to keep the vessel spot on course one hundred percent of the time, and to have a head stuck between you and the compass for quite long periods can be very irritating; however Bomber suffered in silence.

The man on the wheel is relieved after two hours, he then changes with the man on the wing or the bridge who has been acting as stand-by and lookout. At this point in time the Second Officer would bark "Cocoa" rudely pointing to his china mug on the bridge window frame.

Bomber received this command submissively and climbed down the two ladders to the main deck to the ships' galley. By chance I was in the galley when Bomber entered. "Ah Peggy, would you mind going below for me. Beside my bunk you'll find a small tin box that once held matches, bring it up for me like a good lad will you?" I darted off and quickly returned with the said box "Thank you my boy, I will now give you a lesson in the making of really good cocoa" he said, in that beautifully cultured voice. Extracting a silver wrapped wafer from the box, he proceeded to peel this exposing a chocolate block, which he then dropped into a mixture of cocoa and water and stirred vigorously. Wondering what all this was about I asked what he had added, "Exlac my boy, good old Exlac, there's enough in that cup to clean out a whole herd of elephants". As I had never heard of this Exlac I had no idea what to expect.

I then watched Bomber return to the Bridge, carefully carrying the hot cocoa, which he placed exactly where the Second Mates finger pointed, then made his way to his position on the wing of the bridge. After casually looking occasionally through the open door, he later noted with some satisfaction that Stan Travis had quaffed the entire mug of cocoa.

A full half hour passed before Bomber was aware that Stan was rubbing his stomach then clutching at his mid-riff, and seemingly no longer aware of the ships course. Then he called loudly "Barnes, Barnes, call the Captain up immediately". "Sorry Sir, I didn't hear you", answered Bomber. "Tell the Capitan to get up here as soon as he can" the distraught Second yelled again, now doubling over with arms crossed over his stomach. Bomber leisurely climbed down to the galley where he lit a cigarette, had two or three puffs, then climbed up to the boat deck to the Captain's quarters. Softly he knocked at first, then banged loudly until the skipper roared, "Yes, what is it". Trying hard to repress a smile Bomber very seriously replied "Barnes here Sir, the Second Officer wants you on the bridge at once Sir". The Captain opened his door, "He what?" Bomber repeated his instructions. The look the Captain gave him would have melted a bucket of tar, "This better be good," he snorted as he pushed past.

The two men arrived back on the bridge just in time to see the Second empty his bowels inside his snappy uniform, where upon a foul odour was emitted permeating the whole wheelhouse and chartroom. The sound of the Skipper berating the hapless Second Mate was music to all our ears, especially Bombers and to add to our great delight in the ensuing melee the bloody china mug had been smashed to smithereens.

I realised then what a terrific ally I had in Bomber. The incident was never referred to again, his only remark to me after all this was over being “Manners my boy, maketh the man”.