

VISIT TO SOUTH AMERICA 2019 HMS AJAX & RIVER PLATE VETERANS ASSOCIATION

TRIP REPORT

CHILE

Monday 2nd December 2019 ~ Saturday 7th December 2019

URUGUAY

Saturday 7th December 2019 ~ Saturday 14th December 2019

ARGENTINA

Saturday 14th December 2019 ~ Wednesday 18th December 2019

To Commemorate 80th Anniversary
THE BATTLE OF THE RIVER PLATE
13th December 1939



Hello Everyone

Welcome to the Diary of the 2019 Tour of South America which commemorated the 80th Anniversary of the Battle of the River Plate.

My fellow travellers included relatives of crew members of HMS *Ajax*, *Exeter* and *Achilles* who actually fought in the Battle along with members of HMS Ajax & River Plate Veterans Association including The Mayor of Ajax, Ontario.

The tour brought together old friends and others who very soon became friends; we flew together, we walked together, we “cable-carred” together, sailed together, road tripped together, some of us swam together, some tangoed together and we all drank together.

It was a fantastic trip and tribute to all those who fought and in some cases died at the Battle of the River Plate.

My personal thanks must go to everyone for making it such a memorable and enjoyable time, something I will never forget. Particular thanks must go to Malcolm for his amazing organisation of the tour, we would have been literally lost without him and to Peter Danks and Alan Phillips for compiling the background to this Diary.

I hope you enjoy it as much as I have.

Happy Reading

Nigel Masters

Chairman HMS Ajax & River Plate Veterans Association

ATTENDEES

			Country
Ashton	Louise	Granddaughter HMS Ajax Captain Woodhouse (Later Admiral Sir Charles Woodhouse)	All
Ashton	Richard	Husband of Louise	All
Batt	Doug	Son of Robert 'Bob' Batt HMS Achilles	Uruguay & Argentina
Batt	Julie	Wife of Doug	Uruguay & Argentina
Bell	Steve	Son of Stephen Leonard Bell (Lenny) HMS Exeter River Plate 'A' Turret Shell room	All
Bell	Pam	Wife of Steve	All
Burton	Bob	Associate member - former Royal Navy	All
Byrne	Paul	Former member of HMS Ajax frigate	Chile & Uruguay
Collier	Shaun	Mayor Town of Ajax, Ontario, Canada	Uruguay & Argentina
Collier	Rose	Wife of Shaun	Uruguay & Argentina
Collis	Malcolm	Son of Joseph Collis HMS Ajax 1st Commission 1935 -'37. Association Archivist	All
Collis	Gavin	Grandson of Joseph Collis HMS Ajax	All
McGuire	Kirsty	Great Granddaughter of Joseph Collis HMS Ajax	All
Boland	Sean	Fiancé of Kirsty	All
Danks	Peter	Former member of HMS Ajax frigate. Association Secretary	Uruguay & Argentina
Harwood	Benjamin	Grandson of Commodore Harwood Fleet Commander British ships (Later Admiral Sir Henry Harwood)	Uruguay & Argentina
Harwood	Kate	Wife of Ben -Associate member	Uruguay & Argentina
Harwood	George	Great Grandson of Commodore Harwood	Uruguay & Argentina
Harwood	Rosanna	Wife of George	Uruguay & Argentina
Harwood	Giles	Great Grandson of Commodore Harwood	Uruguay & Argentina
Harwood	Serena	Great Granddaughter of Commodore Harwood	Uruguay & Argentina
Harwood	Jonathan	Grandson of Commodore Harwood Fleet Commander British ships (Later Admiral Sir Henry Harwood)	All
Harwood	Sue	Wife of Jonathan -Associate member	All
Irwin	Graham	Travel Counsellor	All
Lear	David	Former member of HMS Ajax frigate	All
Maynard	Lynne	David's partner	All
London	Ray	Son of Stanley James (Jim) London River Plate HMS Exeter	All
Peacock	Jaine	Ray's partner	All
Masters	Nigel	Former member of HMS Ajax frigate. Association Chairman	All
Parker	Paul	Associate member - former Royal Navy	All
Parker	Margaret	Wife of Paul -Associate member	All
Phillips	Alan	Former member of HMS Ajax frigate. Association Committee	All
Phillips	Carol	Wife of Alan -Associate member	All
Phillips	Stuart	Associate member	All
Phillips	Sandra	Wife of Stuart -Associate member	All
Pullen	Julie	Daughter of Colin Chadwick River Plate HMS Ajax	All
Pullen	Phil	Husband of Julie	All
Steer	Debbie	Associate member and Resident Ajax Ontario Canada	All
Tibbs	Caroline	Granddaughter of HMS Ajax Captain Woodhouse (Later Admiral Sir Charles Woodhouse)	Uruguay & Argentina
Tibbs	Phillip	Husband of Caroline	Uruguay & Argentina
Ward	Ken	Former member of HMS Ajax frigate	All
Ward	Christine	Wife of Ken -Associate member	All

INTRODUCTION

This publication is a mix of, mainly, Peter Danks' diary and Alan Phillips' recollections with the odd contribution from Malcolm Collis and serves to give a little insight into the fabulous trip that was to be known as the "South America Trip"

Planning for the trip had taken the best part of three years but eventually everything had fallen into place with individuals and organisations in all three countries all organised, signed up and ready to go.

We were aware of civil unrest in Chile that had started some six weeks before we were due to fly on 1st December and were getting regular Foreign & Commonwealth Office email updates but the troubles never really made the news back home. It, therefore, came as something of a surprise when four days before departure date Malcolm, just as he was going to bed, received an email from the Mayor's office in Concepción ... in Spanish. Assuming it would be a 'welcome' email he opened it up in Google translate – it didn't make for good reading! In a nutshell, following a high level government and police meeting about our trip, the official advice was now not to travel anywhere near Concepción – the whole purpose of the trip.

Following frantic phone calls next day Graham came up with a Plan B which was to stay in the same hotel in Santiago, Panamericana Providencia, for the extra two days.

Two days before departure Malcolm received a phone call from the Defence Attaché in Santiago to advise that Valparaiso was not looking good nor was the centre of Santiago but travel was still not 'not advised' so the group were given the option with sticking with a highly modified itinerary or to pull out of the Chile leg or trip: thankfully everyone was happy/prepared to carry on.

Graham's team worked wonders again and came up with Plan C. Rather than stay on in Santiago we would now spend the last two nights in Santa Cruz wine region far from the troubles with the good news being that the refund on the Concepción element would cover this change.

We hoped not to have a Plan D

CHILE



Sunday 1st December 2019 - departure

28 members of the HMS Ajax & River Plate Veterans Association assembled at Terminal 4, Heathrow for the first leg of the South America trip to Santiago, Chile, via Paris, France on Air France 1281. The flight left on time just after 5.30pm and we were soon in Paris Charles de Gaulle airport where we were to connect with AF406 for the 14½ hour night flight to Santiago. Due to passenger numbers the plane was slightly smaller than the original booking but once on board within our group booking block, with a bit of seat shuffling, we all were more or less satisfied. We sat back for the very long flight.



Paris to Santiago

Monday 2nd December 2019 - arrival

We arrived in Santiago ahead of schedule around 10.00am despite having a delayed departure. We were met at the airport by Eduardo, our guide for the next five days and stepped out to sunny and hot weather, 30°C, as we made our way to the transfer bus. Debbie Steer from Ajax, making her way from Toronto, should have landed at about the same time but was delayed by snow so alternative arrangements were made.

Once settled into our Panamericana Hotel Providencia we all met up for a talk given by Malcolm & Graham. This was mainly centred round the civil unrest which had occurred in Chile over the past few weeks. Here we were joined by Debbie following her delayed flight.

We already knew that our planned trip to Concepción had been called off due to the civil unrest in the town. This visit was to have commemorated the humanitarian aid provided by HMS *Ajax* and HMS *Exeter* during February 1939, after a major earthquake had struck the area killing 28,000. The revised plan was now to drive down to Santa Cruz as Graham through Travel Counsellors had managed to secure a rather nice hotel in the wine region at Santa Cruz some 150kms south of Santiago, far from the maddening crowd, for our last two nights; nights we should have been in Concepción.

This had meant some rescheduling of our time in Santiago, including an early start across to Valparaíso, two hours away, to meet the Director of the Naval Museum for 9.00am so we could head back before any likely troubles in the afternoon. However, even this was knocked on the head when the Defence Attaché advised not to go at all as there was now a ban on travel to Valparaíso.

Tuesday 3rd December 2019 – City Tour & Ambassador’s Reception

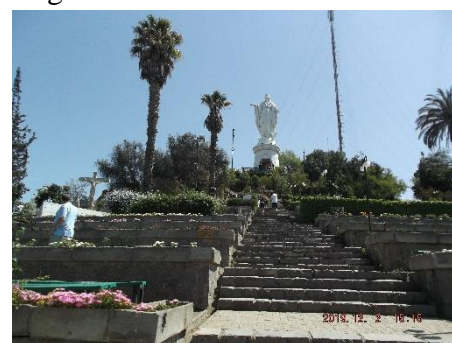
The Defence Attaché’s further advice was to avoid the city centre if we must take a city tour, as we were. 9.00am, with Eduardo suitably briefed, off we set for the morning three hour city tour with, thankfully, no sign of the demonstrations and unrest we had expected except for some shops boarded up and graffiti everywhere. Apparently the troubles normally start in the afternoon and on into the evening.



Funicular de Santiago

We stopped at the *Funicular de Santiago* railway. This is located within the *Santiago Metropolitan Park*, at 722 hectares one of the largest in the world. The funicular dates from 1925 and is a

The city itself is a mix of high rise office buildings, apartments, plazas and every now and then some of the older buildings with that “Spanish” look. We



San Cristóbal

national monument. Departing from *Barrio Bellavista*, it travels 500 metres up a 45 degree incline to *San Cristóbal Hill*, on which stands the statue of the *Virgin Mary*. Stunning views of Santiago were seen from the various viewing points including the area which had seen the worst of the riots not that far away and although we could hear crowd noises and drums we couldn't see any disturbances.

Back on the bus we made our way to the *El Aperero* restaurant for lunch. Unexpectedly, this was included in the tour along with copious amounts of wine. Everyone was enjoying themselves but the three hour tour took more like seven hours which was fine except Jonathan Harwood was due to deliver his "Battle of Coronel & Falklands" talk at 3.00pm back at the hotel – that was hastily rescheduled. The plan had always been that Jonathan would present this talk, specially prepared for the trip, to a public gathering in Concepción. We were also scheduled to drive down to the town of Coronel. As this was not to be we were keen that the group should hear the talk.

What was meant to be a leisurely time back to the hotel getting ready to go out was somewhat rushed due to the lateness of our return and the fact that the Ambassador's Reception had, at short notice, been brought forward from 8pm to 6pm so their staff could get home early evening before the transport system shuts down.



Ambassador's Residence Santiago

We made our way to the British Ambassador's Residence for the first of our formal civic receptions. A group photo was taken in front of the residence, a listed building, before signing the guest book. As we walked in we were met and greeted by His Excellency Mr. Jamie Bowden and his charming American wife Sarah, along with the Defence Attaché, Captain Chris Saunders MBE RN. The very grand colonial building was slightly surreal as the huge garden was enclosed on three sides by huge skyscrapers looking down upon proceedings, the occupants of which were treated to the lone piper, a local doctor, giving it his all on the lawn.

The Ambassador formally welcomed us and Malcolm delivered a speech and made presentations to the Ambassador and Defence Attaché in appreciation of their hard work to make the trip to Chile possible. At this reception the Concepción shield that we had specially commissioned for the visit was

presented to Captain Chris Saunders by Malcolm and likewise gifts for Armando Cartes, the pivotal player who worked closely with Malcolm but was stuck in Concepción. Chris assured us he would formally present them in Concepción once the civil unrest dissipates.



Presentation of Concepción Plaque

A brilliant evening at which a jolly time was had by all.

Wednesday 4th December 2019 – into the Andes

We had had good views of the Andes as we landed and the snowy peaks dominated the views from the city with *Cerro El Plomo* at 5,434 metres, 17,783ft, being the highest we could see, but today we were actually travelling up to the Andes - via a local supermarket, mainly for water supplies. We were aware that the trip up, and down, would be spectacular if not somewhat scary and then arrived at the ascent

section of the road – from 500 metres up to 3000 metres via some 32+ rather tight hairpin bends in our 32 seater coach, the largest allowed to travel on that road! We secretly wondered what it would be like in the winter with snow and ice on the roads!

Stopping off at a viewing point we were all excited by the sight of two huge condors flying very near to our location (later on we saw so many that we got fed up with them). Continuing up we finally reached our destination, *Valle Nevado*, (Snowy Valley) which is a winter ski resort located in the *El Plomo* foothills of the Andes, 3000 metres (just under 10,000 feet) above sea level. We knew we were high as someone's crisp packet exploded on the way up (on the way down a water bottle had crushed demonstrating the pressure differences).

As it was summer at the time of our visit there was no snow, except on the highest peaks, and all hotels were closed making it a rather eerie place to walk around. But at least we could all say we'd been to the Andes! Back on the bus and down the tight hair pin bends to the *Hotel de Farellones* for lunch and refreshments.



Alan & Carol Phillips on top of the world



Most of the Chile group

Back down at city level at 500 metres and back to the hotel where in the evening we had an excellent, rearranged, lecture given by Jonathan Harwood (grandson of Commodore Harwood) on the WW1 Battle of Coronel and the Battle of Falklands.



Jonathan Harwood delivering his talk

Thursday 5th December 2019 – to Santa Cruz

Today we left Santiago and travelled south on Highway 5 to Santa Cruz, located in the wine-producing *Colchagua Valley*, about 100 miles south of Santiago. Highway 5 is actually the Santiago section of the famous *Pan-American Highway* stretching continuously, almost, from Alaska to near Cape Horn, all 30,000kms of it. Through a fair section of Santiago the Highway tracks and crosses the Mapocho River, a tributary of the main Maipo River, currently just a trickle but a raging torrent when the melt waters of the Andes pass through in the spring.



Santa Cruz Hotel

After booking into our hotel, the *Santa Cruz Hotel*, which describes itself as “*Located in front of the city square of Santa Cruz ... in its attractive colonial-style construction*”, a leisurely walk around town was made by some before returning to the hotel for a visit to the *Colchagua Museum* within the hotel complex. The museum exhibited Chilean Archaeology, paleontology, pre-Columbian art, carriages, weapons, jewels of the Andes, agricultural machinery, Chilean railways and a superb section on the *Great Rescue* - in 2010, 33 miners were rescued after 69 days from 700 metres down a collapsed mine in the Atacama region of northern Chile.

Friday 6th December 2019 – Wine tour

At 09.00am we departed on the coach for the visit around the *Santa Cruz vineyard* at *Lolol*. Only since 2003 has it been a vineyard and at 150 hectares quite small, benefiting from the rains borne on the Pacific winds only 40kms to the west they pride themselves on being 100% solar and exceptionally eco-friendly. They mix great winemaking with a cultural tour of *Mapuche, Aymara* and *Rapa Nui* villages.

Upon being greeted we all came across a rather large tarantula sitting on the steps leading up to the main reception area.



Llamas

Once introductions had been made, not to the spider, we were ushered into the cable car gondolas which took us up to a small exhibition centre of early Chilean life and introduced to mother & daughter llamas (pronounced yamas apparently) that live in one of the exhibition houses.



One rather large tarantula

Back at ground level we toured the winery finishing with the long awaited tasting. Celebrated for its *Cabernet Sauvignon, Malbec, Merlot, Syrah* and *Carrener* wines, we sampled a few with our young guide throwing herself into her duties by finishing off the leftovers! She admitted to being somewhat nervous as this had been her very first tour done in English. On completion of the tasting we moved into the dining area for a 3 course lunch of which King Fish was one choice, with more wine available.

Returning to our hotel members had a free evening for a walk around the small town with its many shops. Christmas was in full swing with trees and decorations going up in the park opposite the hotel – somewhat not Christmassy with the temperature in the low thirties.



Getting ready for the wine tasting!



Santa Cruz vineyard

TO URUGUAY



Saturday 7th December 2019 – to Uruguay

Leaving the hotel this morning we made our way back towards Santiago and its airport for our 3.54pm Latam Airways LA410 flight to Montevideo. The day had started cloudy and a bit chilly but as we neared Santiago the sun came out and the temperature rose into the twenties. We passed back through the fertile agricultural region where the many fruit trees and vegetable fields supply Santiago with its needs.

Santiago Airport was a bustling place but fortunately the check in desks were near the entrance and we all felt quite grateful having walked what seemed like miles when we arrived.

Vast quantities of gifts had been brought out from the UK but clearly Malcolm had not repacked them quite as well as when he flew out because when he came to check in he was fined US\$100 for being 2kgs over weight and being last through he couldn't redistribute. He was taken off to the other end of the airport to pay his fine and after a lengthy queue he was issued with his ticket; fortunately Eduardo looked after him.



View of River Plate and Uruguay

Our flight was uneventful with spectacular views over the Andes with some peaks covered in snow not that far below us. All thoughts of the film *Alive* were dismissed. As we dropped down for Montevideo we were aware that we were actually flying along the River Plate for quite some distance – now we knew what the view had been like for Lieutenant Lewin eighty years previous! Landing at Montevideo we were met by our guide, Alexandria and soon boarded the coach with Martin the driver, as he was to be all week.

At the *Esplendor Cervantes Hotel* we were joined three more Group members with Douglas (son of Bob Batt who served in HMS *Achilles*) and Julie Batt from New Zealand and Peter Danks who had visited Guyana and Trinidad on his way out

taking our number to 32. We were welcomed by Karina Aprile from the British Embassy who gave us certain tips and advice – the best of which was to pay for food and services by plastic as foreigners get the 20% VAT refunded back on their card within hours.

Once booked into our hotel it was a case of exploring the surrounding area and making a beeline for the *Bar Americano* next door where trade suddenly escalated over the next seven days as the hotel had neither bar nor main restaurant.

One of our party was unwell and in need of medical attention so Karina and Malcolm took her to the *British Hospital* by Uber. After a relatively short wait Malcolm and much better patient arrived back at the hotel just before midnight.

Sunday 8th December 2019 – City Tour & Silver River Lodge visit

Today saw us set out on the first event of the Uruguayan leg, a 3 hour city tour with Alexandria our guide. The first stop was in Independence Square. The city was founded in 1724 when 13 families arrived from the Canary Islands and set up a Government. Overlooking the Square is a tall building, *the Salvo Palace*, built in 1923 and proved the perfect look out over the action in the harbour in 1939.



José Artigas Monument and Mausoleum

The national hero *José Artigas* is the subject of a huge monument astride his horse and his remains are kept in the underground mausoleum below guarded by the "*Blandegues de Artigas*" – guards who stand motionless for hours next to his casket.

On one side of the Square is a building where the President works. The streets were for the most in straight box like lines but a long diagonal street saw us arrive at the *Legislative Palace*. On "*18th July Avenue*", the main avenue, there are

many Art Deco buildings. The three parts of the building are *Executive* (President), *Legislative* (Parliament) and *Judiciaire* (Power). Two flags are flown from the building; the National flag and the Artigas flag. At school parades the top student carries the National flag and the second student carries the Artigas flag.

Leaving Independence Square we reached *Prado Parque* in the north of the city to see the historic monument in tribute to the *Indios Charruas* (indigenous Indians) and is represented by four figures: *Senaqué*, a healer; *Viamaca*, a cacique or leader; the warrior *Tacuabé*; and his wife *Guyunusa* with a fire in the middle of their gathering, for making *mate*.

Also in the park is the *La Diligencia* statue of a stagecoach stuck



Indios Charruas monument

in the mud with a gaucho trying to urge the horses on with another similar statue by the same artist *José Belloni* the *La Carreta* depicting a covered wagon drawn by oxen representing travel in years gone by.



La Diligencia – stagecoach stuck in mud

Alexandria explained how the *mate* national drink is made and several purchases of the necessary equipment were made from a nearby stall by members. The calabash gourd bowl, often covered by leather or silver, is half filled with cold water to allow the dried leaves of the yerba mate to swell; then hot water is added and when infused is drunk through a metal straw. A common sight is to see the local



La Carreta – covered wagon & Oxen

people with their flasks of hot water and bowls of mate as they walk around town or gather to sip from the communal bowl – even our driver Martin had one and a few of the group tried a sip!



Stall holder displaying mate pots

On returning to the hotel, many of the party gathered in the foyer for a “crocodile” walk the one kilometre to the *Silver River Masonic Lodge*. We were expecting to be met at the hotel by a lodge member to escort us but two cars turned up; some members gratefully accepted the offer of a lift whilst the rest followed our masonic leader. This was an optional visit; others chose to venture afield - Jonathan and Sue Harwood hired bicycles and rode to find *Avenida Almirante Harwood* some 30kms round trip from our hotel.

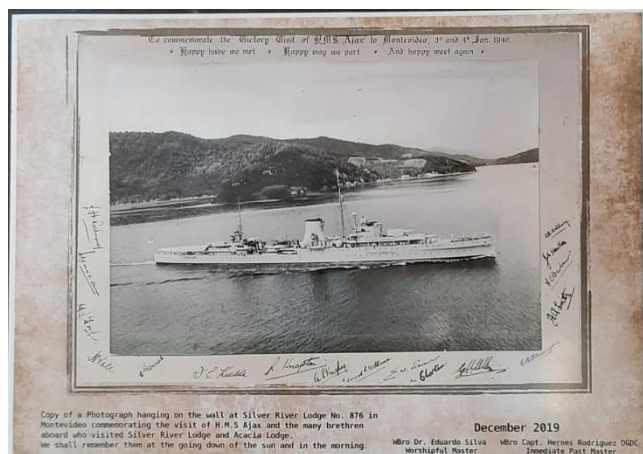
The Lodge is part of the Grand Lodge of England system and was formed in 1862 and is number 876. It is known as the *Gran Logia de la Masoneria de Uruguay*. Within Uruguay Freemasonry there are 110 Lodges. We were warmly welcomed by Dr Eduardo Silva the Worshipful Master and his fellow lodge members and a most convivial afternoon followed. Brother George Stewart proved a more than



Silver River Lodge Bar

able barman, free, and he was kept busy. George, who had arranged the visit with Malcolm, had served many years on the survey ship *RSS James Clark Ross* in the Antarctic. Several members of the Lodge spoke; Alvrá Pereira is a retired Uruguayan Naval Captain and now conducts inspections on Uruguayan registered ships. Martin McAdam was 10 years old when he saw the Graf Spee blow up; he added that when he arrived from Britain in the early 1930s, there were four cows and ten sheep per inhabitant!

On the wall of the Lodge is a framed picture of the cruiser *HMS Ajax* when she visited Montevideo in 1940 which was signed by crew members at the time of the visit and the reason for our visit.



Silver River Lodge photograph

Dr Silva presented each member with a copy of the photograph and showed the party the inner lodge where we had a group photo which appeared on the *RNRMC** web page. Other Lodge members explained the history within the Lodge which was very fascinating. Malcolm and Nigel made presentations of Association memorabilia commemorating our visit to Dr Silva and other Lodge members.



Appropriately next to the optics!

Before leaving, the Association’s pennant and shield were already hanging on the wall behind the bar.



Lodge members with Association Members

[*Royal Navy & Royal Marine Charity who had generously contributed to the trip.]

A free evening allowed members to explore and eat at the many restaurants within easy walking distance from the hotel.

Monday 9th December 2019 – Full day trip to Colonia del Sacramento

On a very hot and sunny morning we set off west along Highway 1 for the 180 km journey to our destination. The historic quarter of *Colonia del Sacramento* was declared by UNESCO as “World Cultural Heritage” site in December 1995. Located by the River Plate, the city still preserves its original walls and on entering via the *Puerta de la Ciudadela* drawbridge we found the cobblestone streets lined by many buildings from the 18th century that have been restored with some turned into museums; one of the best is *Calle de los Suspiros* with houses dating back to the first colonial period with Portuguese and Spanish styles side by side.



The Puerta de la Ciudadela



Cobbled streets of Colonia del Sacramento

Alexandria then led us on a short walking tour over very cobbled streets warning us to beware of the strong sun and wear a hat: she didn't have one so Malcolm treated her to one so she could comply with her own advice. The Portuguese settled in 1680 but this was not popular with the Spanish and between then and 1777 ownership of the town changed seven times with many killed during these troubled times. The City was like a fort and was a bone of contention between the two countries.

The national tree of Uruguay and Argentina is the *Ceibo*, coral tree, with bright red flowers which were in bloom as were the colourful Jacarandas. By the port there were ruins of the old wall around the city and a wooden drawbridge. In the square the Rufous Hornero or Oven Bird, very common in this area, was pointed out as was its nest high in the trees looking like a round mud oven. It is the national bird of Argentina.



Lighthouse at Colonia del Sacramento

Soldiers of Juan Manuel de Rosas started the construction of a lighthouse in 1845 and it was finally completed in 1857. Those who paid and climbed to the top were rewarded with views, albeit distant, of the skyscrapers of Buenos Aires 50kms the other side of the River Plate.

A wonderful city with many museums of Spanish and Portuguese replicas, artefacts and documents of different periods and cultures of Colonia; slightly touristy but memorable nonetheless and once the group had mustered it was time to get back on the bus to return to Montevideo.



Plaza de Toros

As we left we passed the derelict *Plaza de toros Real de San Carlos* bull ring opened in 1910 to host 10,000 spectators. It was designed by an Argentine architect José Marcovich and financed by Argentine businessmen and built in Uruguay because bullfighting was not permitted in Argentina. The Uruguayan Government were also against the sport and to dissuade attendance heavily taxed ferry passengers coming from Montevideo and Buenos Aires. The arena only staged eight bull fights before *President José Batlle* prohibited

bullfighting and it closed it down in 1912. It has remained derelict ever since although moves are afoot to convert for concerts and flats.

Philip and Caroline Tibbs joined the party in the evening after their adventures in Patagonia.

Tuesday 10th December 2019 – Free Day

Shaun Collier, the Mayor of Ajax and his wife Rose joined the group bringing our numbers to 36.

On a very hot and sunny day, members of the party took the opportunity to do their own thing, some explored the city, one went off birdwatching but nine went to the *Estadio Centenario y Museo del*



The football group

Fútbol at the National stadium in the Parque Batlle neighbourhood. Here they met their very enthusiastic guide Gerard Cal who showed them around. He was so proud of Uruguay's efforts in World football and, having staged and

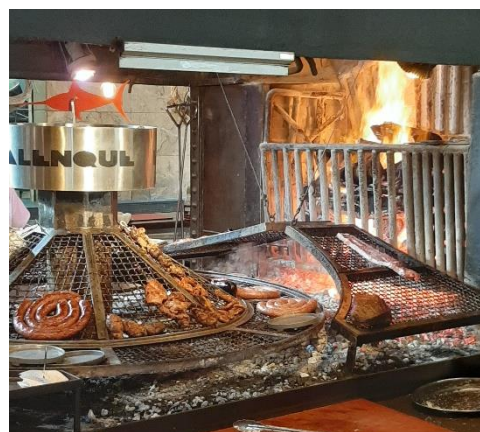


The Estadio Centenario ... and Peter

won the first World Cup in 1930, he and Uruguay were hopeful they may be awarded the Centenary World Cup in 2030. He said the first three Uruguayan Association Football League presidents, started in 1915, were English. The Stadium seats 65,000 with prices ranging from U\$15 to U\$50.

The temperature had soared to 35°C late morning so shade was of prime importance. Malcolm had arranged the tour through the embassy and the stadium director general *Dr Mario Romano* had kindly waived the entrance fee. Gerard was so pleased they had taken the time to visit the museum and thanked them very much.

The *Puerto Mercado* market area down by the port harbour near *Comando General de la Armada* building proved to be a big attraction not only for tourists and the general public but also with Association members with its countless restaurants each with their own *asados* - open flaming fires upon which all manner of meats are cooked on the *parrilla* grills, filling the huge building with wood smoke.



One of many parrilla in the Puerto Mercado

In the afternoon Peter met up at the hotel with Pablo Aversente, a cricket enthusiast who, with Malcolm's help he had been able to track down. Peter, Graham and Nigel had an interesting time chatting with him as he spoke no English but being resourceful they got the hotel receptionist to act as interpreter! Peter was delighted when Pablo presented him with a cap and a Victoria Cricket Club shirt with "Peter Danks" and "80" printed on the reverse. It was Peter's 80th birthday in June so he wasn't too sure if that was a coincidence! Nigel and Graham also received shirts. The receptionist thanked them as he had learned a lot about cricket.

This evening we had a formal reception at the British Ambassador's Residence where we were greeted by His Excellency Ian Duddy and Group Captain Robin Smith, the Defence Attaché. There were many

members of the Montevideo community present, many more than in Santiago where the troubles had kept people away. A most enjoyable evening then followed with drinks, refreshments and speeches.



Ambassador's Residence

Drake had lived in the house at the time of the negotiations in December 1939.

Richard Cowley spoke of how he became involved with Millington-Drake and came to live in Montevideo. Richard was initially Malcolm's Uruguay contact until he realised he would be away on a cruise at the time of our visit and thus nominated Richard Empson to take on that mantle. Richard is a lecturer on cruise ships and Peter first met him in the Cunard Queen Mary in 2012 when his final lecture was on the Battle and, thanks to a contact from Stephen Harwood, he was then able to give him some Association memorabilia with which to hopefully enhance his lectures. Richard in the end cancelled his cruise to be with us although we saw no more of him during the rest of the week as he was poorly. His daughter Sarah is Vice-Counsel at the embassy. Richard attended the 75th luncheon at Portsmouth.

Malcolm responded and with Nigel presented gifts to Mr Duddy; Jonathan spoke of his grandfather and presented a book from the family. Shaun, representing the Town of Ajax, presented a book of the Town's history. All too soon it was time to leave a splendid evening when many new friends were made.



HM Ambassador Ian Duddy's welcome



Socialising on the Ambassador's lawn



Ambassador, Peter, Debbie & Nigel



Impromptu exit music by Debbie

Wednesday 11th December 2019 - visit to Punta del Este

On another hot morning (temperature 32°C) we set off by coach for the 90 minute, 130kms drive east along the river to *Punta del Este*. This world renowned seaside resort provides a perfect combination of natural beauty and a sophisticated cultural and social life. Punta del Este is situated in the province of *Maldonado* and *Rocha*.

Passing the *Holocaust Memorial* on the Montevideo river front *Rambla* the absence of restaurants along the length was explained – the strong prevailing winter winds had long since killed trade and the owners had moved their premises to the sheltered streets further back. At *Punta Ballena* we stopped off at the *Casapueblo*, now a hotel, built by *Carlos Vilaro* in tribute to his son *Carlos Miguel*, one of the survivors of the 1972 Andes air crash. This unscheduled diversion made us somewhat late!

Besides visiting the city we were also attending an informal ceremony at the *Ajax Anchor Memorial* on the *Plaza Gran Bretaña* at *Punta del la Salina* the southernmost point of Uruguay and delineates the point where the sea meets the river. It is also the closest point to the action that took place 80 years previously as *HMS Achilles* passed by not 4 miles away as she shadowed the *Graf Spee* past the *Isla del lobos* on her way to Montevideo.

We picked up our local guide at Bus Stop 14 on the way through; *Andrew Beare MBE* is the Honorary Consul for the British Embassy here in the city and he directed us to the anchor. Andrew is also one of the volunteers of the city's *ADES* life boat (our RNLi), which originally came from England. Andrew had been most helpful working with Malcolm on a plan to set to sea in their boats in the absence of the navy, but this plan had been superseded.



Ajax Anchor against the River Plate

The anchor is actually a sheet or spare anchor kept in the waist of the ship and following research we had been able to establish it had been gifted to the city by the Admiralty in about 1950 after *Ajax* was scrapped. Malcolm had managed to get the city to give the anchor a much needed lick of black paint before our arrival, having been asked his advice on the best sort – we were told not to touch it!



Uruguay Navy

We arrived slightly late to a large gathering of people including local dignitaries, members of the community, Uruguayan Navy representatives and colour party with flags and television and media



The formalities

interest, indicating the importance placed on our visit

The Mayor of Maldonado, *Ing Enrique Antia* spoke first and welcomed people from all over the world and



Association members with the Anchor

hoped for peace and understanding as it was important to strengthen relationships. He wants to bring the *Graf Spee* anchor, currently at the Montevideo Port area, to this site and is hopeful it might happen one day.

When Andrew Beare MBE, grandson of Lloyd Hirst (who had been involved in the events of 80 years ago) spoke he said it had been a novelty for Uruguay to become involved in the war. He added that he hoped it never happens again. A representative from the *Intendencia de Maldonado* spoke of the involvement of the local children with the battle. *Captain Lavandera*, Naval Chief of the Port was also present. Malcolm replied on behalf of the Association [see annexe] and made presentations before Nigel and Dave laid a wreath beside the anchor. Shaun presented a book on the town of Ajax and Jonathan spoke after which he presented a Harwood book to the local Mayor. A general mingle with the crowd reinforced just how welcome we were. Malcolm spoke to one gent and his son who turned out to be the diver who had raised the *Graf Spee Bronze Eagle* and therefore eligible to a share of the sale value estimated to be 28 million dollars – when Malcolm said he was to be become a



Nigel presenting Andrew Beare with a flag for ADES

rich man Andrew Beare added that he already was! Malcolm didn't mention our secret viewing this coming Saturday!



Association Wreath wording

We then made our way to the Punta del Este Yacht Club for lunch followed by a city tour. The population of the city is about 5,000 but in summer this doubles with visitors seeking the wonderful sandy beaches. Many of the owners of the huge houses are from Buenos Aires who also come for the sand as the Argentine coast has only mud, apparently. The sea front stages international electric Grand Prix Motor racing.

A few brave souls took to the sea on the *Playa de Los Ingleses* (The English beach) while others paddled – not sure whether they were in the Atlantic or the River Plate. Next door is the *Playa Brava* beach with its famous and photogenic large sculpture of



The Hand on Playa Brava

of fingers emerging from the sand variously called: *Monument to the Drowning Man; The Fingers; Man Emerging into Life* or just plain *The Hand* in English.

Made by Chilean artist Mario Irarrázabal during the summer of 1982 while attending the first annual International Meeting of Modern Sculpture in the Open Air – at the end of the exhibition he just left it there.



Local schools unveil the QR code about the Battle

Crossing the Maldonado River separating Punta del Este and La Barra involved driving over a very strange “wavy” bridge, one each way, resembling a rollercoaster that our driver took great delight in speeding over, both ways. An interesting concept with art ruling over practicality?



The Wavy Bridge

We also stopped at the *Hotel Ajax* for photos but carried on past the incomplete *Trump Tower* and headed for home, dropping off Andrew on the way.



Stopping off at the Hotel Ajax



Trump Tower

Thursday 12th December 2019 – Andes museum, historical tour, Naval museum & Reception

This was to prove a rehearsal for a marathon day of events which was to follow on the 13th. In the morning we had another “crocodile” walk, this time to the *Museo Andes 1972* meeting up there with



Museo Andes 1972 with Jörg seated

Ben, Kate, George and Rosanna, Giles and Serena Harwood who had arrived yesterday, minus luggage, although staying in a different hotel (bringing the group to 42).

Opened in 2013, this museum is dedicated to the 1972 Andes airplane crash and is a labour of love for the curator Jörg P A Thomsen, who is a personal friend of the affected families and was our host for the tour.

29 Uruguayans lost their lives, some from the initial crash, others from an avalanche later on. Most of the museum tells the story of how the remaining 16 managed to survive on the limited supplies they could find from the wreck, debris from the crash site, personal items and, ultimately and reluctantly, resorting to anthropophagy – or cannibalism as the media preferred to sensationalise it. Their story is told in the film *Alive*. The plane crash profoundly impacted on Uruguay’s national psyche. Jörg mentioned that the 16 survivors were still alive at the time of our visit.

Using original objects and photos from the crash site, it tells the story of the survivors who battled harrowing conditions for 72 days before returning alive to a stunned nation. In short, on 13th October 1972, a Uruguayan plane with 45 people, including a rugby team, friends and relatives on board, crashed in the Chilean Andes in a site 4000m (13,000ft) above sea level killing 17 of the crew and passengers. With a short journey expected, many passengers were in summer clothes and without plentiful food. On the sixteenth day after the crash an avalanche hit them, burying them completely and killing a further 8 people. Food shortage became the critical issue. This forced them to make a very

tough, difficult and controversial decision. They used the bodies of their dead mates and passengers as food. The search for them had been haphazard and half-hearted, assuming they must surely be dead. If they were to ever get out alive it was down to them. Two volunteered to try and trek out for help without knowing where they were or what direction to head in. Remarkably after ten days of hiking under extreme conditions they came across a cattle drover who eventually summoned help bringing an end to 72 days of horror, pain, hunger, and desperation which ended with a ‘return to life’ of the 16 survivors to their homes and families, although many were and still are, deeply affected by their ordeal.



HMS Ajax Bell

After lunch Alberto Marquez, a local historian and author acted as our guide on our historical River Plate tour. Malcolm had arranged to meet Alberto and Ben’s party who were staying in a different hotel, at the Graf Spee anchor site in the dockyard thinking this would be simple! Imagine Alberto’s feelings when the coach was refused entry to collect them – in his frustration he said “Graf Spee came here uninvited 80 years ago yet we are not allowed in on a pre-arranged visit!” – which was not strictly true. One location was a visit to the oldest house in Montevideo, down by the Docks but having spent so much time at the harbour and going to a site he was told not to go to the tour was not what it should have been and not worth the money.

This made us late for our appointment at the *Museo Naval* keeping ambassadors and dignitaries waiting. After formal introductions we split into two groups for a quick tour of the exhibits, including the day uniform of Admiral Henry Harwood, a superb model of the *Graf Spee* and the famous *Ajax* bell. The original damaged bell was presented to Uruguay by Admiral Harwood and Sir Eugen Millington-Drake in London in 1949 and later publically displayed at Montevideo harbour. However, it was stolen, then replaced by a replica but *HMS Ayax* was an obvious error and so was again replaced – the one now securely on display!

Malcolm delivered a speech to the Director of the museum and handed over many gifts as it had been requested that we give the museum what we could to stock their new ‘Battle of the River Plate’ room being set up.



Unveiling the Plaque

Then over the road to assemble before the 75th anniversary memorial for the unveiling of an 80th anniversary plaque to mark the Association’s visit. This was carried out by the British Ambassador, His Excellency Ian Duddy, and the German Ambassador, His

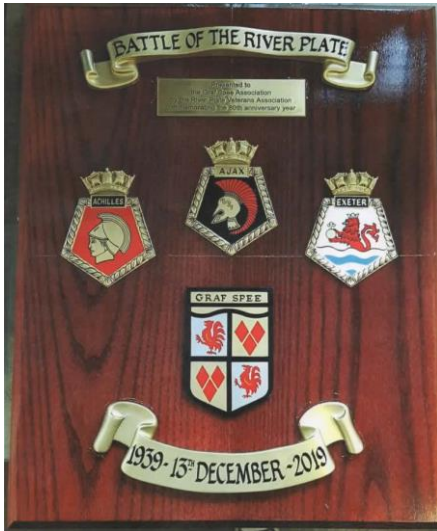
Excellency Ingo von Voss. Also present was Captain Langsdorff’s daughter, Inge Nedden, her husband and other people related to crew members of the *Graf Spee*.



Group photo by new Riverside plaque

In the evening we were invited to a reception and supper with the *British Society in Uruguay* at the *British School Carrasco*, where Richard Empson MBE and his members made us most welcome. In his introduction he said we were commemorating together the events of 80 years ago.

Also with us were Igne & Rudiger Nedden and Enrique Dick over from Buenos Aires. Richard added that the British way of introduction is with a joke, while the German approach is to start with a definition. A battle at sea had no 'place' to remember the event, whereas a battle ashore did have a place for remembrance.



Presentation of Association Plaque

He hoped we would not fall back to those days and we were gathering tonight for happy memories. Captain Dr Jörg Hillmann, *Commandant Centre of Military History and Social Studies of the German Armed Forces* spoke. Richard then introduced

Jonathan Harwood adding there was no need for an introduction of anyone with the name of Harwood, who then gave an excellent talk on the Battle of the River Plate.

A most lovely supper was served by the members of the British Society following which Malcolm spoke [see annexe] and Nigel presented to the Society one of our large plaques specially commissioned for the trip. He also gave gifts to Richard Empson as a thank you for all his help in working with Malcolm in organising the visit. Shaun Collier presented a Town of Ajax book and Jonathan Harwood made presentations to Richard.

Friday 13th December 2019 - 80th Anniversary Day

This special day which had been three years in the planning was upon us.

The day began with everyone in their formal dress with a service at the *Templo Inglés (The Cathedral of the Most Holy Trinity)*. In front of a pretty full congregation Dave and Paul, the Association Standard party, paraded in accompanied by Patricia Izubejeres playing the bagpipes. Music was played by Elena Marino and William Shaw was the bugler. He was later to use the bugle belonging to Bob Batt who had used it while serving in *HMS Achilles* at the Battle in 1939 and which his son Douglas had brought out to Uruguay.



The Bugle of Bob Batt HMS Achilles



Malcolm delivering the Introduction

Malcolm gave the Introduction [see annexe] and the Welcome was given by His Excellency Ian Duddy. He wished to thank the Reverend Cynthia Myers Dickin for arranging the service to be held in the Cathedral and spoke of a time to reflect and to remember and pay tribute to the

men who were engaged in events of 80 years ago. We are now strong allies and have developed a spirit of reconciliation. The Uruguay people share this commemoration day. He concluded by thanking members of the Association for travelling so far and for preserving the history for future generations.



Piper at Templo Inglés

The opening address was given by the Right Reverend Daniel Genovesi, Bishop of Uruguay. Ms Joan Lucas-Calcraft gave the bible reading which was from Isaiah 25 vs 6-9: Joan had been selected to deliver the reading, not only for her wonderful reading voice but also the fact that at 96 she had been active during WW11. Reverend Cynthia Myers Dickin gave the address [see Annex]

After the bidding prayer, Nigel unveiled the Commemorative Plaque, commissioned by the Association, beside the original honours board built in Chatham and listing those crew members who had died at the Battle in 1939. [see Annex]



Chairman Nigel Masters Unveiling Plaque



The Exhortation was delivered by Group Captain Robin Smith the United Kingdom Defence Attaché. Following the Last Post, Two Minute Silence and Reveille, played on the WW11 bugle, the placing of wreaths then took place by the Honours Board. Wreaths were laid by Nigel Masters Association



Wreath Laying – Mayor Collier

Chairman; Shaun Collier Mayor of Ajax; granddaughters Caroline Tibbs and Louise Ashton, on behalf of Captain Woodhouse, and grandsons Jonathan and Ben Harwood and grandchildren George, Giles & Serena on behalf of the Harwood family.



Giles, Jonathan, Ben, George & Serene Harwood

Granddaughter Kirsty McGuire laid flowers on behalf of the family in memory of Judi Collis.



Flowers in memory of Judi Collis

The Naval Prayer and the Blessing brought the service to an end after which refreshments were served in the tea room where presentations were made by Malcolm. The service, and the rest of



Caroline Tibbs & Louise Ashton for the Woodhouse family

the day, was filmed by a German TV crew who were making a documentary on Captain Hans Langsdorff.

See: https://www.ndr.de/fernsehen/sendungen/schleswig-holstein_magazin/zeitreise/Kapitaen-der-Admiral-Graf-Spee-ein-Held.zeitreise2444.html



Inge & Rudiger Nedden, daughter of Hans Langsdorff



Dave & Paul with Standard

Next stop was to the *Cementerio Británico* (British Cemetery) for the 12.30pm service at the common grave of three *HMS Achilles* crew whose bodies were washed up (after burial at sea). Malcolm gave the Introduction [see Annex] and this was followed by a Welcome from *Her Excellency Raylene Liufalani, New Zealand Ambassador to Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay* and this is reproduced [see Annex]. The *Right Reverend Daniel Genovesi* conducted the Service after which *Lieutenant Commander Edward Dunn RNR* gave the Exhortation.



Her Excellency Raylene Liufalani

After the Last Post, again played on Bob Batt's bugle, and a lament played by the piper, Two minute Silence, and Reveille, came the Placing of Wreaths; the Association wreath carried out by Douglas Batt and Peter Danks. A further wreath was laid by the Woodhouse family together with others including one by Mayor Shaun Collier on behalf of the Canadian Ambassador present. A Prayer of Thanksgiving brought the service to an end.

After the Last Post, again played on Bob Batt's bugle, and a lament played by the piper, Two minute Silence, and Reveille, came the Placing of Wreaths; the Association wreath carried out by Douglas Batt and Peter Danks. A further wreath was laid by the Woodhouse family together with others including one by Mayor Shaun Collier on behalf of the Canadian Ambassador present.



German Ambassador laying wreath



Common grave of 3 HMS Achilles



Two Minute Silence



Douglas & Julie Batt



The "Harwoods"

The final service, on land, was to be at the *Cementerio del Norte*, the resting place of the 36 Graf Spee crew who lost their lives during the River Plate action. Malcolm gave the Introduction [see Annex] and the Welcome was given by Artur Brunner, *Counsellor of the German Embassy* [see annex]. A lecture of Memorial text “*Totengedenken*” (Remembrance) was given by The *German Defence Attaché*, Colonel Frank de Waele. This piece was particularly poignant, conciliatory and moving and reflected the sentiments of the week and is replicated at the end of this document [see Annex].



Delivery of the Totengedenken

This was followed by music by the *German Choir Montevideo*; Prayers by Rev Jeronimo Granados; a speech by His Excellency Ingo Von Voss, German Ambassador to Uruguay; placing of wreaths by Service dignitaries while Julie Pullen, daughter of River Plate *Ajax* veteran and Alan Phillips laid a wreath on behalf of the Association. The wording on the wreath reflected that from the British Merchant Navy Captains taken prisoner on board Graf Spee and released on arrival at



His Excellency Ingo Von Voss, German Ambassador

Montevideo. “*To the memory of brave men of the sea from their comrades of the British Merchant Service*”. Alan Phillips also laid a British Legion wooden cross and on behalf of the Exeter Association, Ray London and Steve Bell, laid crosses.

During the Minute’s Silence the bugler was to play “*Silencio Militar*”. Unbeknown to Malcolm, who had arranged all aspects of all the services, this and the standard were stopped - he believes by the Bishop, without reference to him. As he said later it was good job he didn’t know at the time else there would have been a diplomatic incident!



Julie & Alan having laid Association Wreath

Remarks by Rudiger Nedden on behalf of Inge Nedden, daughter of Navy *Captain Hans Langsdorff* was followed by “*Ich hatt einen Kameraden*” (I had a faithful comrade) sung by the German Choir. The *Farewell* was given by Artur Brunner, *Counsellor German Embassy*. Patricia Izubejeres played ‘*Highland Cathedral*’ and ‘*Amazing Grace*’ which was well received as was the lament ‘*The Battle of the River Plate*’ composed by a *Gordon Highlander* piper who was moved to do so following a visit.



Steve & Ray at Graf Spee Memorial

On completion of this final Service, invited guests and members of the Association drove to the dockyard where they embarked on the *ROU Capitán Miranda*, three masted staysail schooner training ship of the Uruguayan Navy. Built in 1930 as a survey ship for the Uruguay Navy, she was saved from the breakers yard and converted into a training ship. It represents the “*mystic of a ‘State with Sails’, that as a living Nation at its maximum expression, carries by means of a group of men and women the message of peace and friendship of the Uruguayans through the different oceans and seas of the world.*”



The Capitán Miranda

Once greeted on board by the Admiral and Captain, we were about to set sail when the gangplank was lowered again for the, late, film crew. With everyone now on board we set sail on engines only and proceeded to the spot where the Graf Spee scuttled herself - 34°



Welcome aboard

58' 18" South, 56° 17' 57" West – just in International waters six miles out from the harbour. We were escorted by a ROU Frigate and ADES lifeboat!



Dave & Lyn with their white carnations ...



... and Bob & Nigel



Introduction to ceremony

Food and drink was handed out together with a white carnation for everyone on board.

Once in position the engines stopped. Malcolm explained [see Annex] the events leading up to and significance of where we were; then we all cast our individual flowers onto the waters of the River Plate in memory of those who lost their lives in the action. The two Defence Attachés in an act of unity, cast a wreath as did the Neddens – both were



Ready to set sail



The German & British Defence Attachés cast the wreath.

biodegradable. The musicians from the *Cementerio del Norte* played “*Silencio Militar*”.

As we made our way back we were very grateful that the weather today was much calmer than the day before when wind threatened to put today’s trip in the balance but to the pleasure of everyone the sun blessed us with a fine and calm day. The loud speaker announcements were in Spanish and unfortunately for one association member (name withheld by request) thought he heard “*hands to bathe*”- fortunately he didn’t go in the water.

Once back into the dock area, all passengers had to negotiate ashore via the frigate *Uruguay* and the oiler replenishment ship *General Artigas*.



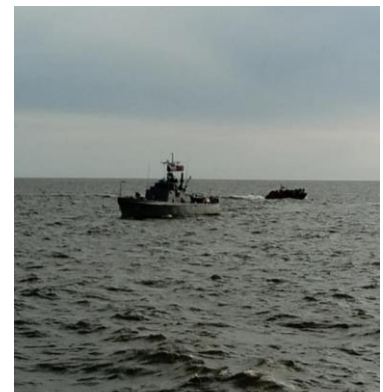
A close call for one seasoned sailor – at least we had a life boat with us!



Disembarkation navy style!



The Captain, Mayor & Admiral



Our escort flotilla



Alan, Dave & Ken at the Graf Spee Anchor



The Navy seemed pleased with one of the gifts!

On the way out the coach, legally, stopped to let us walk around the Graf Spee anchor and rangefinder, denied to us yesterday.



Jonathan and his Graf Spee Rangefinder

That was not to be the end of the day's events as an invitation to the German Ambassador's Residence for a formal reception was next on the programme meaning it was straight there for 7.30pm from the sailing.



German Ambassador's Residence

We were now getting used to these formal occasions and were greeted by the Ambassador and other dignitaries, several of whom we greeted as old friends. Among the new ones was Dr Alberto Guani who is the grandson of *Dr Aberto Guani* who was the Uruguayan Foreign Minister in 1939 and at the very centre of the political and diplomatic negotiations that then took place. It was interesting to hear him say that when visitors come to Montevideo three main points of interest they ask about are, in order: where is the soccer stadium?; we'd like to know about the Andes Tragedy and finally; what has happened to the Graf Spee?



Presentation to the Ambassador

His Excellency Ingo Von Voss, the German Ambassador spoke and much appreciated our visit and wished us a safe journey home. Malcolm [see Annex] and Nigel made suitable presentations to him and Defence Attaché Frank de Waele. Drinks and nibbles were consumed and a jolly time was had by all.



Presentation to Defence Attaché

A fitting end to a most memorable and historic day that will live long in our memories and provided possibly the highlight of the tour so far.



German Ambassador & Peter

On return to the hotel the Americano Bar next door provided a useful watering hole for those still in need of sustenance.

Saturday 14th December 2019 – a mystery tour and ferry

Paul Byrne was gone before the rest of us were up. He was flying home today but from Buenos Aires which meant taking the early ferry, but from Colonial del Sacramento which in turn meant a two hour coach trip to get there.

For the rest of us the day dawned bright and sunny with a mystery tour planned. Few apart from the driver and Malcolm knew our destination and only Malcolm knew the reason! Malcolm had been working on this for months and it was only in the last few days that we had been granted permission from the very highest level! The coach had been booked for 9.30am for 3 hours and that was it. Neither Malcolm nor the Embassy knew where we were going until the day before.

After an interesting drive via the shanty town outside the city, Malcolm having been given the wrong address by the Embassy, we eventually, after phone calls to the embassy, arrived, late, at a Naval Base in the middle of nowhere down by the river miles from anywhere.

We were admitted via strict security and met up with Captain Saralegui who was overseeing our visit. We lined up before the armoury and with strict instructions regarding photographs, in groups of eight in turn we were given access under escort past racks of automatic weapons into the enclosed area of the armoury. Under the careful watch of three armed Naval Officers there before us was the mystical *Graf Spee* “Bronze Eagle” leaning against a wall with the security curtain open for us. The two metre high 350kg bronze eagle with outspread wings clasp a round *Swastika* had adorned the stern section of the *Graf Spee*. It was salvaged in 2006 but soon afterwards, due to the controversy surrounding it, had been locked away in a secret location. The eagle had been in the media lately as the courts had ruled that it should be sold and the estimated US\$28million to be split between the Government and salvage companies.



The Graf Spee Bronze Eagle briefly on display before being locked away from public view.

It was a great thrill to be able to stand before the eagle and touch it, barnacles and all, albeit only for a few minutes, and to relish the fact that apart from military personnel and Government officials we were the first people to have seen it since it was locked away.

Malcolm still doesn't know who finally facilitated the visit but we all felt so privileged to have been allowed in.

It was a fitting conclusion to our week in Uruguay and for many, another trip highlight.

Then it was back on the coach to the hotel dropping several off at the *Puerto Mercado* on the way. Most had already packed and checked out and stored their cases behind the reception although a limited number had been allowed to hold on for a late check out. The coach to take us to the ferry terminal wasn't until 5.30pm leaving free time for those still keen on sightseeing.

Several groups went up the *Palacio Salvo* which at 106 metres and 27 storeys was once the tallest building in South America giving far reaching views out over the harbour. During the hectic days 80 years ago, Eugen Millington-Drake would view the *Graf Spee* from the top floor. There is a lighthouse on the very top of this building which is lit at certain times.

With everybody mustered at the hotel we awaited the coach.

TO ARGENTINA



Arriving at the ferry port, just beyond the *Graf Spee* anchor, we said cheerio to Alexandria and Martin our driver who had been with us throughout the time in Montevideo. The Buquebus Fast ferry *Francisco*, named after the Pope, is one of the fastest ferries in the world travelling at 58 knots and completes the 200km journey in 2¼ hours. It has a capacity of over a thousand and will take 150 vehicles.



Alexandria, Martin & Graham



Very fetching!

Prior to boarding we were issued with white cotton overshoes to wear – rather like the scene of crime officers in police films, but nobody was too sure what purpose they served. Then it was very similar to an airport booking-in procedure; all luggage was checked in and placed on a scanner to be picked up at the other end. We went through the Uruguay exit passport check, pleased that our passports were now stamped as arriving at the airport it was all electronic so no stamp. Then moved five yards to the queue for entry through Argentina passport check where we collected another passport stamp before boarding the boat passing the duty free shop that wouldn't open until we were in International waters.

There was no access to the open decks due to the speed of the ferry which was disappointing as we had hoped to get good views of the sunset up the River Plate and then the lights of Buenos Aires as it got dark. We soon all found comfortable seats and settled down for the 7.30pm departure.

Arrival into Buenos Aires saw us ditching our overshoes and making our way to the luggage carousel then to our nearby transfer bus. Many of us had become aware of troubling news about a shooting a few blocks from our hotel where a British holiday maker was killed the day before our arrival. Malcolm had already checked with the Embassy and tried to reassure us that it was considered a random one-off incident.

A short ride took us to our hotel, the *Hotel Dazzler Maipú* although the street was too narrow for the bus so we had to carry our cases the last 100 metres! Booking in was going smoothly and the first members were on their way to their rooms when we experienced a power cut stopping the lift and computers. The receptionist wouldn't issue room keys without entering passport details on the system and that was that. After about 25 minutes the power was back on and eventually we were soon safely tucked in bed.

Sunday 15th December 2019 – two commemorative events



Captain Hans Langsdorff's Grave Cementerio de la Chacarita.



General Enrique Dick opening proceedings



The Association's response

behalf of the Association by Chairman Nigel Masters, Langsdorff's daughter Inge, the British Legion, the Graf Spee Association and the German delegation Coronel Frank de Waele, Defence Attaché.



Inge Nedden lays a wreath on her father's grave

This was to prove another memorable, historic and emotional day. The rain which had started when we left the hotel stopped as we arrived at the *Cementerio de la Chacarita*. Making our way to join the large gathering, probably about 250 people present, the Remembrance Service began at 11.00am at the *Cementerio Alemán* (German Section) where Captain Langsdorff is buried. General Enrique Dick *President of the Graf Spee Association* conducted the service. Two pipers led the Association Standard, paraded by Dave, alongside the Union Flag and the British Legion, Buenos Aires branch Standard, supported by an armed guard from the Scottish Guard.

Dr Rudiger Nedden gave an address in English [see Annex] which was translated into Spanish by Catalina; then she and Lola read out Captain Langsdorff's final letter to his wife [see Annex] followed by a speech by Malcolm [see Annex], translated into Spanish by Laura Fricke, and finally a speech, in three languages given by Enrique Dick.

Incidental music was provided by an *Argentine Navy Band* looking very impressive in their best white uniform.

Wreaths were laid on



Argentine Navy Band 1

The names of the deceased Graf Spee crew were read out and reference made that the actions of Captain Langsdorff had saved not only

1055 of his own crew but also the lives of the British and New Zealand sailors; it was necessary to celebrate life and, for the living, reconciliation.



Chairman laying Association wreath



Peter, Inge & Rudiger Nedden beside grave

On completion of this service it was a smart march off, led by the Buenos Aires British Legion armed guard followed by the three standards and then all the dignitaries. We all made our way over to the *Commonwealth War Graves* section of the cemetery. Until recently the German and British Cemetery sectors were divide by a tall brick wall but to commemorate the centenary of the ending of the *Great War* a gate was installed and dedicated on 11th day of the eleventh month of 2019 as an act of reconciliation – a theme we had heard so often on this



Plaque commemorating the new gate

trip.

Once in the British Cemetery we made our way to the front of the grave of *Able Seaman Jim T Frederick* of *HMS Exeter* who died from his wounds three and a half months after the battle.

Here a British Legion service was held. Malcolm gave the introduction [see annex] and following further speeches the Association wreath was laid by two sons of *HMS Exeter* River Plate crew, Ray London and Steve Bell The guard of honour, as it was at the previous ceremony was provided by the



The grave of J T Frederick

Scottish Guard.



Ray & Steve laying the wreath on behalf of HMS Exeter Association



J T Frederick's grave



After the services, invited guests and members departed for a luncheon and reception with members of the *Graf Spee Association* where President General Enrique Dick, whose father served in the *Graf Spee*, was our host. The lunch was at the premises of the *Sociedad Alemana de Gimnasia*.



Roberto Scholz & son at the Asado



Desserts!

An outstanding table of cold and hot dishes, the latter from an enormous *asado* fire was followed by an equally fantastic menu of desserts. The chef for lunch was Roberto Scholz whose father had served in *Graf Spee*.

Enrique took the opportunity to present copies of a *Graf Spee Association* book to members of his Society and our Association. Malcolm responded on behalf of the Association [see Annex] with Laura Fricke acting as Spanish interpreter and his speech was very well received. Much memorabilia was presented to Enrique in recognition of all his efforts of working with Malcolm for over two years



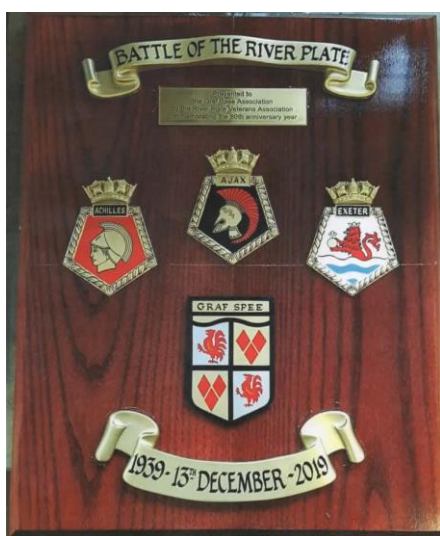
The River Plate Association presents the Shield to The Graff Spee Association



Mayor of Ajax presents Street Sign to the Graf Spee Association

while Nigel presented a huge Commemorative Association Shield. Shaun Collier presented a Town of Ajax painting to Inge Langsdorff and a book on the town of Ajax and there were gasps from the assembled guests when he presented a “*Langsdorff*

Drive” street sign to Enrique and this was acclaimed with much pleasure.



Malcolm was pleased to present *Tim Lough* with Association memorabilia; Tim is Deputy Chairman of the British Legion and was extremely helpful with arrangements for today’s event. Jonathan also presented his book.



Mayor of Ajax presents Town painting to Langsdorff’s daughter

Also over from Germany with the Nedden’s were Kurt & Erika Dambach. Kurt had served in the later *Admiral Graf Spee* training ship and he too was presented with an Association plaque.



Malcolm & Enrique

This lunch was to be the last of some 26 official speeches, introductions and presentations which Malcolm had made. A recurring theme from other speeches throughout were host remarks such “thank you very much for travelling so far to see us”; “it is an honour for you all to

join us for these commemorations”.



Alan with Graf Spee Association Commemorative Board

We could have stayed much longer but our coach driver had a deadline to meet and so we reluctantly made our way back onto the coach for our journey back to the hotel, dropping several ‘extra’ passengers off on the way.

This was the culmination of the commemorative functions on the trip itinerary and the whole day had been unforgettable.

Monday 16th December 2019 – City Tour, meeting & Tango Show

A warm, dry morning as we set off on our city tour. Alexandra was our guide as we went through morning traffic. The mix of modern and old colonial buildings, wide avenues and parks give the city a wonderful feeling.



Entrance to the Cementario La Rocaleta

You don't go to Buenos Aires without the obligatory tour round the Cementario La Rocaleta where the mausoleums are works of art themselves. What might appear a strange place to visit the cemetery



Some of many labyrinths



Plaque for Eva Perón's Mausoleum

turned out to be anything but. Highlight was probably the mausoleum of *Eva Perón*, a beautiful film actress. Duarte was her family name and from being born into poverty went on to become the second wife of the Argentine President Juan Perón. She died aged just 33. President Perón's third wife still lives in Spain. The President is buried some 150kms away. The musical and film ‘Evita’ documents her life.



Yours for US\$500000

The designs and variety of the extremely ornate mausoleums and crypts flanking the narrow walkways were incredible and to think one of the cemetery's mausoleums recent sold for US\$500,000!

Passing through the *Recoleta* area the accommodation standards clearly improved; the rich had moved here

from the *La Boca* area because of the many deaths from yellow fever due to the many mosquitoes by the river. As we passed the Japanese Gardens



Slightly cheaper – but with room!

Alexandra pointed out the dog walkers – quite an industry and pastime apparently, with walkers taking up to 20 dogs at a time.



Walkies Buenos Aires style

The 'El Libertador of Argentina' statue of San Martin



Buenos Aires skyline

commemorates the country's independence from the Spanish on 9 July 1816.

Another site of interest was a huge metal tulip-shaped sculpture which should open in the morning sun and close at night ... but awaits repair



Mechanical opening tulip

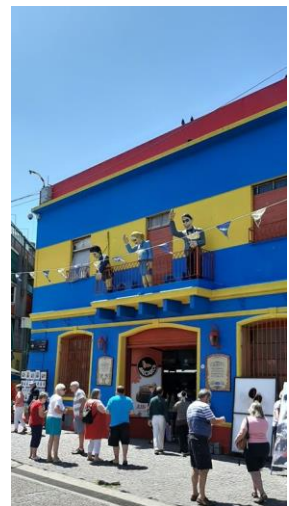


Dave

The football fanatics were not to be disappointed as we passed the 'Boca Juniors' La

Bombonera stadium which seats 40,000; one of two famous sides in Buenos Aires, the other being 'River Plate' who won the Argentine

competition earlier in December. Italians were the early settlers and lived in the tenements by the football ground. Diego Maradona and Carlos Tevez are two of the local stars, while now Lionel Messi is the national pin up of all the football fans. The *Boca* side chose the colours of Sweden for their shirts. This was near to the *Puerto de Madero* which used to be the main port.



One of the many colourful buildings



Peter and friend

We walked round *El Caminito*, a very touristy area with many gaudy buildings, souvenir stalls and musicians adding to local

atmosphere, not forgetting opportunities to have one's photograph taken with the Tango Ladies. The blue topped domes of the Russian Orthodox Church stood out amongst the local buildings.

Ben and his group left us after the tour to continue their travels in Argentina, spending Christmas there.

In the afternoon, invited guests from the *Graf Spee Association* joined us at our hotel to listen to Jonathan present his very interesting talk on the Battle of the River Plate which was very well received. Many of the Association members were descendants of the Graf Spee crew and a lively exchange of memories ensued.

In the evening came what all the 'Strictly Come Dancing' fans were looking forward to – dinner and tango show at *La Ventana*. Another almost obligatory event in Buenos Aires. We were not to be disappointed. The group were shown upstairs to their ballroom where a most enjoyable meal was taken on arrival; Argentine pasties (*Empanadas*) were one of the available starters, followed by various options including, what else in Argentina, steaks. The traditional grilled 'baby beef' was anything but and came with chimichurri sauce. Copious amounts of wine accompanied the dishes.

Once we finished our desserts the magnificent exhibition of tango dancing began accompanied by a pianist, two violinists, two bandoneons; and a double bass. Other acts included a fantastic mandolin player and display of gaucho music with the dancer twirling a *bolos*, 2 wooden balls at the end of rope used to capture cows, at incredible speed. On completion there was opportunity to have one's photograph taken with one of the dancers, one or two did take the opportunity!



Gavin ready to tango



Peter and another friend



Kirsty and friend



The professionals

Previously, Alexandra had explained that men initially danced the tango with other men due to yellow fever killing off many women; then prostitutes became their partner of choice and finally men danced with 'ordinary' women.

It was a late finish but not late enough for some diehards to visit the all night outside bar right next to our hotel.

Tuesday 17th December 2019 - Free Day

Caroline and Phillip had departed for the UK before breakfast.

In the morning, Peter joined Phil and Julie and Ken and Chris on a visit to the Railway Museum. With



Ken, Julie, Phil, guide, Chris & Peter at the Railway Museum

Phil and Ken keen railway buffs, it was a pleasant way to conclude the trip. Other members took the opportunity to visit parts of the city and complete their Christmas shopping; Malcolm had gone off for the day on a birdwatching tour.

Peter later had a wonderful meeting with David Parsons, a cricket enthusiast, an MCC Member, a long standing historian of Argentine cricket and the Argentine Cricket Association who were shortly to host a visit from the MCC. No interpreter was needed on this occasion.

Shaun had identified a brilliant restaurant for the end of trip evening meal, the *El Mirasol* down at the waterfront. A proper steak house! Members chose a variety of steaks and one or two interesting starters. Testicles were on the menu but we thought it safe to try as we had Jonathan with us who probably



Diners at El Mirasol

spends some of his day job removing such things from poor unsuspecting animals. A plate was ordered for fun and several members tried them and while not as bad as “*Get me out of here*” bush tucker trials, all preferred their steaks. Jonathan could not identify who the owners were!

Several members spoke: Jonathan said he had had a brilliant time with thanks to Malcolm and his highlight was the Church Service in the Cathedral in Montevideo. Nigel said a dream grew into a most memorable trip and that he was extremely pleased to have been part of the ceremonial aspects with his highlight being laying the wreath on the grave of Hans Langsdorff. Doug thanked everyone for their friendship and looked forward to welcoming people in New Zealand. For Malcolm the trip was a dream three years ago and it turned out to be tenfold beyond his expectations; he said it had been perfect with a good social group. Shaun said he and Rose had thoroughly enjoyed everyone’s company and he had now a greater grasp of the history of the Battle and the Association. Members then raised their glasses to toast the memory of Judi Collis.

Wednesday 18th December 2019 – departure day

All too soon it was time to pack up, check out and catch flights back to various parts of the world. Shaun, Rose and Debbie were headed for Canada; Douglas and Julie for New Zealand and the remainder were due to be back in England to face final shopping and cold weather, but a post General Election Britain!

Doug and Julie were on a later flight and Peter had already left for his flight. The main group assembled in the hotel foyer to await their 1.00pm coach transfer to the airport and Malcolm took the opportunity to record the group singing happy birthday to Basil Trott *HMS Exeter* as he would be calling in to see him on his way home with a 100th birthday gift.

We carried our cases out to the coach parked at the end of the street and, eventually, they were safely stowed and we were off. The airport is situated some 30kms south west of the city centre in the *Ezeiza Partido* region giving rise to the airport's common name *Ezeiza International Airport* and its identifier EZE.

The last presentation of the trip was made, on the bus, to Graham Irwin, Travel Counsellors. Graham had worked closely with Malcolm and made the trip possible and avoided any calamities along the way. The Association owe a great debt of gratitude to him and in addition to the many gifts it was the Association's great pleasure to invite Graham to become an Honorary Member, which he accepted.

Although we had allowed plenty of time for traffic we had a free run and arrived in good time. We said our farewells to Debbie, Rose and Shaun as they were in Terminal A and made our way into Terminal C to check in for our 1¾ hour KLM flight to Amsterdam departing at 4.30pm.

We arrived on schedule the next morning Wednesday 19th December only to find the connecting flight to Heathrow delayed by an hour or more thanks to strikes in France but eventually we made it back to the UK. We all said our fond farewells at the luggage carousel and everyone agreed it had been the trip of a lifetime with so many memories and friends made.

Back in time for Christmas shopping but at least we had missed the election!

ANNEXES

1. Battle of the River Plate Casualties
2. Punta del Este Wednesday 11/12/2019 - Ajax anchor memorial (Extract of speech)
3. Maldonado media reports of visit 11/12/19 – translated by *Phillip Tibbs*
4. British Society Thursday 12/12/2019 lecture supper (Extract of speech)
5. Holy Trinity Cathedral Friday 13/12/2019 - introduction (Extract of speech)
6. Holy Trinity Cathedral Friday 13/12/2019 – address by *Rev. Cynthia Dickin*
7. Holy Trinity Cathedral Friday 13/12/2019 – plaque unveiling *Nigel Masters*
8. Cementerio Británico Friday 13/12/2019 - introduction (Extract of speech)
9. Cementerio Británico Friday 13/12/2019 - speech by Her Excellency *Raylene Liufalani*, New Zealand Ambassador to Argentina, Paraguay & Uruguay
10. Cementerio del Norte Friday 13/12/2019 - introduction (Extract of speech)
11. Cementerio del Norte Friday 13/12/2019 - welcome by *Artur Brunner*, Counsellor German Embassy
12. Totengedenken (Remembrance) words in English
13. Graf Spee wreck site Friday 13/12/2019 - introduction (Extract of speech)
14. Cementario de la Chacarita Sunday 15/12/2019 – Captain Hans Langsdorff grave (Extract of speech)
15. Letter from Captain Langsdorff to his wife: Montevideo 17/12/1939
16. Cementario de la Chacarita Sunday 15/12/2019 – J. T. Frederick (HMS Exeter) grave (Extract of speech)
17. Graf Spee Association luncheon – Sunday 15/12/2019 (Extract of speech)
18. Member's Quotations



HMS Ajax

Cyril BASHFORD
Albert BURRELLS
James CLEMENTS
William FARLEY
Ernest FRANCOM
Harry FOLLET
William LAMBARD



HMS Achilles

Ian GRANT
Neville MILBURN
Archibald SHAW
Frank STENNETT



HMS Exeter

Walter AINGE
Frederick BACK
Frank BETHELL
Joseph BETHELL
Bert BLANDFORD
Raymond BOWES
John BOWMAN-
MANIFOLD
Daniel BRIGHT
Stanley BURRAS
Frederick CAMPBELL
Richard CLARKSON
Anthony COLLINGS
Alfred CROKER
Gilbert DAVIES
Gilbert DOVE
Frederick DYER
James FREDERICK
Frederick FRENCH
Evan GEORGE
Stanley GIBSON

KILLED in ACTION

Stanley HARRINGTON
Hugh HARRIS
Alan HIGGINBOTTOM
Leonard HILL
Ronald HILL
Leslie HONEY
Albert JONES
Michael KAVANAGH
Albert KELLY
Frank LEGG
Arthur LUMSDEN
William MACLEOD
George MANNING
William MARSH
Francis McDONNELL
James McEVOY
Edward MILLS
Christopher MONKS
Clyde MORSE
Thomas NAYLOR
Patrick O'LEARY
David PARRY
Bryan PETT
Alfred PHILLIPS
Richard POWTON
Leslie PULLYBLANK
Frank RANDLE
Tom REMICK
Brynmor RICHARDS
Glyndwr RICHARDS
John RICKORD
Arthur RIGLAR
Wilfred RUSSELL
Richard SMALL
Harry SPENCER
Ernest SQUIRE
Robert STEELE
Agean STUBBS
Robert TAYLOR
Samuel TEAGUE
James THOMPSON
George TOVEY
Alfred TREGIDGO
Donald TYLER
Patrick WILSON

Admiral Graf Spee

Hans-Joachim ALBRECHT
Günther ARNOLD
Helmut BARGENDA
Peter BECKER
Otto BETHGE
Heinrich BONGARTZ
Johannes BRÜMMER
Gerhard CLAUS
Erich DIESING
Karl DREISBACH
Joachim EBERT
Arno GIEBEL
Georg GIRSCHER
Edgar GRIGAT
Walter GROTH
Rudolf HAFERKORN
Ernst HINTZ
Robert HORNEFFER
Paul JANSSEN
Günther KALYTТА
Franz KLAMT
Werner KRÜGER
Gerhard MAUERSBERGER
Karl-Friedrich MEIER
Heinrich NEUHARDT
Wilhelm OLSCHINSKI
Matthias PÜTZ
Max RANGER
Walter RIEDEL
Karl RODE
Max SCHARNOW
Emil SCHELL
Wilhelm SCHMID
Johannes STEUERMANN
Hans-Eduard SÜMMERER
Kurt TIMM
Hermann UHR
Willi WOLF

Hans LANGSDORFF

2. PUNTA DEL ESTE – WEDNESDAY 11/12/2019 AJAX ANCHOR MEMORIAL

Malcolm Collis

We gather here in Punta de la Salina on Plaza Gran Bretaña with the Isla de Lobos 8kms to the south east.

80 years ago at 6.30pm on the 13th December 1939 HM ships Achilles and Ajax were shadowing the German Admiral Graf Spee as she made her way further and further into the River Plate following what we call The Battle of the River Plate that started far out to sea.

Graf Spee passed by just to the south of the island but Achilles passed between us and the island, just in international waters, and whenever she got too close to the Graf Spee a salvo would keep her at bay.

It was reported that the sound of the heavy guns caused many of the seals on the island to hurl themselves off the low cliffs to their deaths.

At this point we are as close to the action as any land based observer could have been and that is why it was chosen to place this memorial to Ajax and the Battle at this spot.

This anchor from Ajax was shrouded in mystery and has been subject to recent research. Thanks to a passage in a book by Lloyd Hirst it transpires the Admiralty gifted it to Punta del Este just after HMS Ajax went to the breakers in 1949 and before the premature death of Admiral Harwood in June 1950. The anchor before us is clearly not one of her main anchors but is a waist or sheet anchor kept as a spare in the waist of HMS Ajax for emergencies.

Those with an interest in the drama of the Graf Spee will be aware of the name Lloyd Hirst and the role he played but whilst looking into the history of the anchor and making contacts it transpires that our guide Andrew Beare is his grandson.

I owe a debt of gratitude to Andrew for it was he who came to my aid ...

3. MALDONALDO MEDIA REPORTS OF VISIT 11/12/19 – translated by *Phillip Tibbs*

Maldonado News.

The battle of the River Plate, a naval battle between the Germans and the British on 13th December 1939 that occurred between Montevideo and Punta del Este during the second world war, was remembered this Wednesday with a thought provoking ceremony in Great Britain square in Punta del Este where there is an anchor from HMS Ajax.

80 years on from the battle, at the remembrance ceremony the subdirector of culture of the municipality of Maldonado gave a resume of the battle:

This historic event took place in Uruguayan territorial waters between the German battleship Graf Spee and the British light cruisers Ajax and Achilles and the heavy cruiser Exeter.

Senor Cairo explained that the Graf Spee had a secret mission to sink merchant ships who were returning to Europe with food and fuel but was intercepted after entering the River Plate where finally it was surrounded by the British ships.

After the battle the Captain of the German battleship asked for help from the Uruguayan authorities and moored in the Port of Montevideo until ‘The captain decided to sink his ship in front of the port to ensure that his enemies could not access the ship’s technology.’

The leader of the British delegation Malcolm Collis gave thanks to those present among them families of the crew of the HMS Ajax; his words being translated by the Honorary British Consul Andrew Beare.

In addition to the floral offerings placed in front of the plaque in memory of the event, teacher Federico Olascuaga presented a QR code on a new plaque – the product of investigations by the students of School Liceo No5 in Punta del Este, which contains the information about the battle of the River Plate.

The Mayor of Maldonado, Enrique Antia praised the work of the students and commended the intention of the Director General of culture of the community to found a museum to commemorate the episode as one of the most important events witnessed by the people of Punta del Este.

Revista Galleria Mirador

80 years of history

The 13th December 1939 produced the first battle between the Germans and the British in the River Plate during the second world war. The Graf Spee and the cruisers HMS Ajax, HMS Achilles and HMS Exeter of the British Royal Navy confronted each other off the coast of Punta del Este. After suffering serious damage, the Graf Spee commanded by Hans Langsdorff took refuge in the port of Montevideo for 72 hours before the ship was blown up off the Uruguayan coast on the 17th of the same month.

80 years after the Battle of the River Plate the British Ambassador gave a cocktail party on 10th December at his residence. Forty were invited among them descendants of the German Crew and British who formed the delegation of the HMS Ajax and River Plate veteran's association together with members of the Uruguayan Navy. All enjoyed an evening in the open air with conversation and commemoration of the historic occasion. Among those present were the daughter of Captain Langsdorff and the Grandson of Admiral Sir Henry Harwood, Jonathon Harwood.

4. BRITISH SOCIETY – THURSDAY 12/12/2019 LECTURE SUPPER

Malcolm Collis

Mr President, members of the British Society in Uruguay, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, on behalf of the River Plate Veterans Association may I sincerely thank the Society for inviting us to this splendid reception here tonight.

By way of introduction we are an Association bringing together the 3 British ships that fought at the Battle of the River Plate 80 years ago tomorrow. Remarkably we still have 4 survivors from that time and the son of one is here from New Zealand. We have members from the Town of Ajax in Ontario named after Ajax and the Mayor is here tonight. Most of the rest here are related to those who served in the 3 ships or served in the later Frigate Ajax.

I am also delighted that Inge Needen the daughter of the Graf Spee Captain is here as is my friend Enrique Dick President of the Graf Spee Association. ...

5. HOLY TRINITY CATHEDRAL FRIDAY 13/12/2019 - INTRODUCTION

Malcolm Collis

It is indeed a great honour to stand before you today representing the River Plate Veterans Association. But why are we here?

80 years ago to this very day the drama that was to become known in Britain as The Battle of the River Plate began to unfold some 4 hours ago and some 700kms to the east of us out in the Southern Atlantic.

Early in 1939 tensions between Germany and Great Britain were increasing with both preparing for a seemingly inevitable conflict. In preparation for hostilities both nations had deployed ships to defend and disrupt merchant shipping. Germany put to sea her fleet of Panzerschiffes, armoured ships, with the Admiral *Graf Spee*, captained by Hans Langsdorff assigned to the South Atlantic and surrounds.

Britain together with France bolstered her Hunting Groups with Commodore Henry Harwood leading Group G South Atlantic Division comprised of HMS *Ajax*, Captain Woodhouse, and HMS *Achilles*, Captain Parry, both light Cruisers and HMS *Exeter*, Captain Bell and HMS *Cumberland*, Captain Fallowfield, both heavy Cruisers.

War between Germany and Britain was declared on 3rd September and the legitimate disruption of cargo ships began on both sides but in the tyranny of war it is most notable that no innocent lives were lost despite the sinking of many merchant ships.

As dawn was breaking on Wednesday 13th December 1939 Commodore Harwood and his Hunting Group G had rendezvoused at a point calculated to intercept a German raider that had been sinking merchant ships having rehearsed their plan for dealing with a ship that out-gunned the three British ships, *Ajax*, *Achilles* & *Exeter*; *Cumberland* was away in *The Falklands* under repair.

The Pocket Battleship *Admiral Graf Spee*, was the first to spot masts on the horizon and took them to be a lightly guarded merchant convoy and steamed towards them. By the time Captain Langsdorff realised his mistake there was no turning back as the three ships had spotted her and gone to Action Stations.

Graf Spee fired her massive 280mm guns first as *Exeter* broke away from *Ajax* & *Achilles* as part of the planned pincer movement returning fire from *Exeter's* 200mm and *Ajax* & *Achilles'* 150mm guns.

Exeter eventually retired badly damaged and made for The Falklands whilst the other two continued to close and bombard *Graf Spee* despite suffering major damage themselves.

For reasons subject to much debate, *Graf Spee* turned and made for the River Plate shadowed by the remaining two ships. Late that night *Graf Spee* anchored off Montevideo, Uruguay, whilst Commodore Harwood worked out his containment plan expecting her come out fighting. His group was later joined by HMS *Cumberland*.

There then began the Political and Diplomatic drama with both sides seeking to use to their advantage the neutrality of Uruguay.

Denied the time considered sufficient to make the *Graf Spee* seaworthy and believing a much reinforced enemy fleet awaited him, Captain Langsdorff made the decision to scuttle her in the shallow waters of the River Plate.

Four days later, with most of the 1000 crew transferred onto waiting boats that would take them to a new life in Argentina she weighed anchor and made her way out into the River Plate estuary some 6 kms south from here.

Here, with explosives primed, the Captain and the remaining crew left the ship to join the others making for Buenos Aires. There followed a mighty series of explosions that all but destroyed the ship and brought the first British victory of the War.

On 20th December Langsdorff shot himself.

The Battle had claimed 116 lives on both sides and their names are duly recorded in the Order of Service.

For Britain and her allies this represented the first major victory of the War and the propaganda value was not lost on Winston Churchill who said, "*This brilliant sea fight takes its place in our naval annals and in a long cold dark winter it warmed the cockles of the British hearts*"

Much worse was to come over the next five years.

I am delighted to have present here today 2 grandsons and 3 great grandchildren of Commodore, later Admiral Sir Henry Harwood; 2 granddaughters of *Ajax* Captain, later Admiral Sir Charles Woodhouse and wreaths will be laid by them together with the Association Chairman Nigel Masters and the Mayor of Ajax, Ontario, Shaun Collier. The Town of Ajax started life as a munitions plant before it became incorporated taking on the name Ajax.

Also present is the daughter of Colin Chadwick from HMS *Ajax*; the son of Stephen Leonard Bell, HMS *Exeter*; the son of Stanley James London, HMS *Exeter*; and the son of Robert Batt, HMS *Achilles*.

I am also extremely delighted and honoured that the daughter of Captain Hans Langsdorff, Inge Nedden, is also present.

Despite occurring 80 years ago remarkably our Association still has 4 surviving veterans from that time.

Basil Trott HMS Exeter who will be 100 in 9 days' time and I shall be calling in to give him a gift on my return

Albert Smith HMS Ajax 97

Robert "Bob" Batt HMS Achilles 97 and living in New Zealand

John Thomson HMS Achilles living in Australia

That we are able 80 years later to come together in peace and harmony and commemorate past sacrifices in solemn respect symbolises that we indeed live in a free world. ...

6. HOLY TRINITY CATHEDRAL FRIDAY 13/12/2019 – ADDRESS BY *Rev. Cynthia Dickin*

We are here today, to remember all those who were involved in what has been and is known as the Battle of the River Plate.

War is a terrible thing, hatred is a terrible thing. That is why Jesus said "*the peacemakers shall be called children of God*", and that we should "*love our neighbour as we love ourselves.*"

Let us give thanks for all those who gave their lives in that Battle.

Wars and conflicts persist across the world. Peace does not just come. Peace is made.

In a world which so easily spills into violence we can all be peacemakers.

We have just read that "*the Sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces and he will remove his people's disgrace from all the earth*" Then "*let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation*"

Those of us who are believers in Christ, understand, as we read Scripture, that our life on earth is a passing chapter; that there is a better life beyond this one

My hope is that as your day unfolds, as you move from this Cathedral towards the resting places of many of those who were involved in the Battle, each one of you will truly be granted a sense of peace, of thankfulness, despite the sadness, despite each one's personal struggles in this life and world. May you may also be comforted in the knowledge of God's love for you as the future and each new day unfolds.

AMEN

7. HOLY TRINITY CATHEDRAL – PLAQUE UNVEILING

Nigel Masters

In 1946 the Rector of this Holy Trinity Church wrote to the Admiralty in London requesting that a memorial board be sponsored.

Rear Admiral Parry (who was the Captain of Achilles at the time of the Battle) suggested that the senior officers may wish to approach former crew members to raise the necessary £330 rather than come from public funds.

After much correspondence over the following years, including a "slight" increase of costs due to the use of a special figured oak rather than rate book oak, this very memorial board was commissioned and made in Chatham Dockyard in early 1949

By June 1949 the question of how to get it from England to Montevideo was under discussion. The first leg was Chatham to Devonport and then on to Bermuda – how it got to its final destination is not recorded in our archives.

However, it was finally unveiled here on 17th February 1950 with all due pomp and ceremony to become the sixth memorial board here.

A copy of the board hangs in St George's Chapel in Chatham and we held our Reunion in October there.

If it had not been for the perseverance of the Rector it seems most unlikely that the board would ever have been made.

It is therefore my pleasure to unveil a further small commemorative plaque to mark the 80th anniversary and to remember all those who fell.

8. CEMENTERIO BRITÁNICO FRIDAY 13/12/2019 - INTRODUCTION

Malcolm Collis

The names of the 116 who died in the Battle are recorded in the Order of Service.

66 were in HMS *Exeter* of whom 61 were buried at sea as she made her way, badly damaged, down to The Falklands; 4 were buried on the Island and 1 transferred to Buenos Aires but later died of his wounds and we shall be paying our respects to him on Sunday.

All 7 killed in HMS *Ajax* were buried at sea on the day of the battle as she made her way up the River Plate shadowing the *Graf Spee*.

Achilles is often referred to in The Battle of the River Plate as HMNZS *Achilles* but whilst she was assigned to the New Zealand Division of the British Royal Navy she was still HMS *Achilles* even though the majority of her crew were from New Zealand. It was not until the formation of the New Zealand navy in October 1941 and her transfer to that navy did she become correctly HMNZS *Achilles*.

All 4 killed in HMS *Achilles* were also buried at sea the next day as she guarded the River Plate close to the Uruguay coast.

In a cruel twist of fate we stand before the common grave of 3 of those 4 crew members buried at sea whose bodies were washed up near Pando some 25 kilometres east along the coast from here. 2 were positively identified as being from Achilles and the 3rd could have been one of the other two.

Of those identified one was Neville Jervaise Milburn, a British Ordinary Telegraphist and the other, Frank Stennett a British Telegraphist aged 18 from Manchester.

The third would be either Ian William Grant a New Zealand Ordinary Seaman also 18 from Dunedin, or Archibald Cooper Hirst Shaw a New Zealand Able Seaman aged 27 from Rotorua.

The Consulate official who examined the bodies reported there were five bodies washed ashore but years later agreed there were only three – I shall not speculate upon the reason for this error.

Douglas Batt the son of Robert “Bob” Batt, Boy Seaman Bugler in HMS Achilles at the River Plate will lay the Association’s Wreath accompanied by Peter Danks our Secretary. Bob is still going strong back in New Zealand

Douglas has brought with him his father’s bugle sounded at the Battle and that very bugle is the one you hear today and is particularly poignant. ...

9. CEMENTERIO BRITÁNICO FRIDAY 13/12/2019 - SPEECH by Her Excellency *Raylene*

Liufalani, New Zealand Ambassador to Argentina, Paraguay & Uruguay

Tena koutou, tena koutou, tena koutou katoa. Greetings to you all.

It is my great honour to be here today as we commemorate the 80th anniversary of the Battle of the River Plate.

This important occasion is made all the more special through the presence of many family members of those brave men who fought not far from here 80 years ago.

As New Zealand Ambassador, it is particularly moving to be here with family of New Zealander, Mr Bob Batt, who is one of only four surviving veterans of the Battle. Doug and Julie, thank you for making the trip over from Aotearoa New Zealand and please convey our kind wishes to your father.

Mr Batt was one of more than 300 New Zealanders aboard the HMS *Achilles* when, together with the HMS *Ajax* and the HMS *Exeter*, they engaged the battleship *Admiral Graf Spee*, which dwarfed the three ships in both size and might,

The resounding victory these men achieved was an important morale boost for the Allied Forces. The role of HMS *Achilles* in the Battle was a special source of pride for New Zealanders who welcomed the Ship’s crew home with a huge parade in Auckland in 1940.

This battle was the first time that a New Zealand unit had struck a blow against opposing forces in the Second World War. The New Zealand men that died just offshore from here were some of the first New Zealand casualties in World War II, where more than 11,000 New Zealanders lost their lives. Given our small population at the time, this was a significant loss of life for New Zealand and its impact was felt deeply.

It was also the first time that a New Zealand warship took part in a naval battle and it provided a boost for the nascent New Zealand naval forces at the time. It foreshadowed the full role New Zealand would play in the naval war over the next six years.

Today, the Royal New Zealand Navy continues to play a vital role in ensuring the safety and security of the people of New Zealand, contributing to global efforts to preserve peace and assisting our Pacific neighbours, including through humanitarian aid and disaster relief.

And so, as we gather here today, we honour those who did not return and pay tribute to those who served in what was a pivotal moment for the war effort and New Zealand more broadly.

Ka maumahara tonu tatou ki a ratou – We will remember them.

10. CEMENTERIO DEL NORTE FRIDAY 13/12/2019 - INTRODUCTION

Malcolm Collis

The names of those who died on board the *Admiral Graf Spee* at the Battle are recorded in the Order of Service.

With the *Graf Spee* anchored up in the harbour here in Montevideo the political and diplomatic battle began but one of the most pressing matters was to arrange the funerals of the dead.

On the 15th December the Uruguayan authorities allowed Captain Langsdorff to bring his 36 war dead ashore and they were buried here with all due ceremony.

Also in attendance were several of the British Merchant Navy Captains taken prisoner on board *Graf Spee* and released on arrival at Montevideo. They laid a wreath of respect with the wording “*To the memory of brave men of the sea from their comrades of the British Merchant Service*”

That wording is reflected on the Association’s wreath laid today by Julie Pullen, one of the daughters of Colin Chadwick who served in HMS *Ajax* at the River Plate as a Boy Seaman. Colin died in 2012. Alan Phillips Committee member of the Association will accompany her.

Other *Graf Spee* crew members subsequently died over the coming months and years and are also buried here.

Once the ship was scuttled and the crew safely removed to Argentina, on the 20th December Captain Langsdorff shot himself.

It is most fitting that his daughter Inge Nedden is present here today. On Sunday the Association will be at his graveside in Buenos Aires to pay our respects in the company of the Graf Spee Association. ...

11. CEMENTERIO DEL NORTE FRIDAY 13/12/2019 - WELCOME by *Artur Brunner*, Counsellor German Embassy

Every year, we commemorate together with our western allies the two world wars. We do this on Day of Armistice, November 11, and on the German Volkstrauertag* when Germany honours the victims of tyranny and terror.

It is legitimate to reflect the past and become aware of the peaceful times in which we live in Europe since 1945. This cannot be taken for granted. Those generations born after WW2 only have known peaceful times due to the experience and suffering of those who went through the wars of the twentieth century with all their horrors.

Today, we come together on a special day and on the scene of historic events near the Rio de la Plata. This morning we remembered the British and the New Zealanders killed in action. Now we remember the Germans who lost their lives in December 1939 in the waters of the South Atlantic.

Most of those soldiers buried in this cemetery were very young. They had no chance to enjoy life, instead they had to serve their country and were on active duty when the war broke out in September 1939. There was no other way. And what had been linked to a touch of adventure, especially in the Navy in times of peace, became bloody serious after the beginning of the war.

Those crew members of the Graf Spee who survived the battle got off relatively lightly from the war. With the sinking of their ship, the war was definitely over for them. They could build up a new life, in most of the cases in Argentina, due to decisions which prevented with great foresight more suffering. The destiny of the British and New Zealand crew members and soldiers who survived the battle and were not taken prisoner was shaped by the course of the war, with different outcome.

I am very glad and grateful that we, as descendents or citizens of the nations at war at that time, today can commemorate and honour together the soldiers killed in action. And I very much appreciate that in these moments the military outcome and the course of the Battle of the Rio de la Plata are put aside. Until today we are aware of the suffering of those who participated in the battle. And we can be grateful and to a certain degree self-confident to have found a common ground in the memory of the past and thus have spared us and our descendents another war in Europe.

Thank you very much for your coming and for your attention.

*memorial day

12. CEMENTERIO DEL NORTE - FRIDAY 13/12/2019 – TOTENGEDENKEN by *German Defence Attaché*

“Today we think of the victims of violence and war, of children, women and men of all nations.

We commemorate the soldiers who died in the world wars, of people who lost their lives as displaced persons or refugees as a result of acts of war or subsequent captivity.

We remember those who were persecuted and killed, because they belonged to a different people, were of a different race, were part of a minority or whose life was declared unworthy of living because of illness or disability.

We remember those who lost their lives because they resisted tyranny and those who died because they held on to their convictions or beliefs.

We mourn the victims of today's wars and civil wars, the victims of terrorism and political persecution, the German Armed Forces and other forces, who lost their lives abroad.

Today we also remember those who have become victims in our country through hatred and violence against strangers and the weak.

We mourn with all who suffer for the dead and share their pain.

But our life is marked by the hope of reconciliation among people and peoples, and our responsibility is for peace among people at home and around the world.”

13. GRAF SPEE WRECK SITE – FRIDAY 13/12/2019 INTRODUCTION

Malcolm Collis

There was and indeed still is, much speculation as to why Captain Hans Langsdorff took the decision to scuttle the *Graf Spee* rather than attempt to return to Germany.

Many factors led him to believe that to fight his way out he would face a much superior force and the most likely outcome would be the loss of his young crew. That he was not prepared to do. Internment was not an option. To destroy his ship and the many secrets it held seemed the only course of action open to him.

And so it was that on the evening of December 17th *Graf Spee* weighed anchor and steamed to the south-eastward into International waters leading many in the huge crowds that had gathered to speculate she was about to give battle. Suddenly she altered course and headed for Buenos Aires but then came to a halt.

The crew, save 43, were transferred to the waiting Tacoma while those who remained made final preparations. Once they too had left a mighty series of explosions were seen and heard.

Captain Langsdorff, who had been persuaded not to go down with his ship for the sake of his crew, ordered "*Pilot, enter in the log book, Graf Spee put out of service on December 17th, 1939, at 2000hrs.*"

And so that mighty ship met her end at this very spot.

Whatever the views back in Germany the fact is that the crew were saved rather than having to face certain death.

On the 20th Captain Langsdorff, having seen his crew safely ashore effectively went down with his ship by taking his own life. ...

14. CEMENTARIO DE LA CHACARITA SUNDAY 15/12/2019 – CAPTAIN HANS LANGSDORFF GRAVE

Malcolm Collis

It is particularly humbling to stand before the grave of an honourable man who as Captain of the *Admiral Graf Spee* found himself and his ship in a situation from which there was no realistic prospect of escape.

Rather than risk the lives of his many young crew he chose the option to destroy his ship rather than let it fall into the hands of his enemy. Because of his actions the crew and their descendants flourished rather than perished.

Being an honourable naval officer, having seen the crew safely in Argentina, he figuratively chose the age-old tradition of the 'captain going down with his ship' when he shot himself on 20th December and was buried here in Buenos Aires on 21st December.

Little would he know that 80 years on, the Battle and his actions would be the subject of so many books, theories and conjecture.

It is indeed an honour for the River Plate Veterans Association to be here today to pay our great respects to Captain Hans Langsdorff in the company of his daughter and members of the Graf Spee Association. ...

15. LETTER FROM CAPTAIN LANGSDORFF TO HIS WIFE Montevideo, 17/12/1939

My Dear Ruth

I am writing this letter on the last day when I am commander of this proud ship.

The British Navy have managed to encircle us in such an overwhelming Superiority that they are ready to fight against us. That means for us the safe sinking and the danger that the ship falls into enemy hands, because it cannot sink in the shallow water, while we have no possibility of seriously damaging the enemy. So my decision was not easy, but two guidelines, which I had set at the beginning of our enterprise, gave me the advice.

First, the willingness to take any responsibility, even with complete use of all my heartfelt crew, as long as there is even a small chance to arm the enemy. On the other hand, the cool thought of not pushing my people to death, but preserving the honour of the ship and the honour of the flag, to the last. Now I am deeply thankful, everything is arranged and I have the peace to write this letter with goodbye and thanks.

If it pleases our Lord, I am fortunate to die, even though life has been worth everything to me, because it has given me everything it had to offer, satisfaction in my career and as the commander of a ship's success in a fight against superiority. You will see how deep my love for you has become. It is so deep that I cannot believe that my earthly death can mean any significant farewell.

16. CEMENTARIO DE LA CHACARITA SUNDAY 15/12/2019 – J. T. FREDERICK (HMS EXETER) GRAVE

Malcolm Collis

James Trevor Frederick served as an Able Bodied Seaman in HMS *Exeter*. *Exeter*, badly damaged, broke off from the action and made her way down to the Falkland Islands burying her dead at sea on the way.

At Port Stanley the ones that later succumbed were buried and the wounded were treated. The Island's medical staff were reinforced by a medical team of nurses led by Dr J. H. Perry who sailed on the *Lafonia* from the British Hospital here in Buenos Aires.

Several of the wounded were taken to Cape Town. During my researches it seems most likely that Frederick was taken back with the British Hospital team to Buenos Aires for further treatment. He did not survive and died on 14th March 1940 aged just 20.

He alone is buried here and the wreath will be laid by Ray London and Steve Bell both sons of HMS *Exeter* crew members. ...

17. GRAF SPEE ASSOCIATION LUNCHEON – SUNDAY 15/12/2019

Malcolm Collis

Mr President, distinguished guests, ladies and gentleman.

... I finish by talking about my very good friend Major General Doctor Enrique Dick. Over the last 18 months Enrique and I have become very good friends albeit as pen pals or rather email and WhatsApp pals, as we developed our itinerary for our time in Uruguay and Buenos Aires. That we finally meet is wonderful.

Enrique from the bottom of my heart I sincerely thank you for all that you have done for me, your wise counsel, your ideas, your suggestions, your organising, without which none of this would have happen for the Association.

You also expanded my mind by recommending your wonderful book, "*In the Wake of the Graf Spee*", available in all good book shops – well amazon, that gave me a true insight into what it was like on the "other side" from cradle to grave for your father growing up in Germany, life as a sailor and the trials and tribulations of life in Argentina and Germany afterwards.

The Association also owes you a huge debt of gratitude for organising today's events and laying on this wonderful feast.

The reverence of the proceedings at both gravesides, the comradeship of this gathering and the conviviality of the guests have served to make today certainly one to remember and a culmination of a wonderful trip to South America, not forgetting that many of us will meet tomorrow to talk further and at which Jonathan Harwood will deliver his River Plate talk.

Our time in Buenos Aires is all too short but I feel sure many of us will be back. ...

18. QUOTATIONS

David and Lynne

Amazing trip and company. The trip was most moving and memorable for us both. It was an honour and a pleasure to have been able to commemorate all those individuals who were involved in the Battle of the River Plate. Lest we forget.

Debbie

Wonderful. Better than I could have wished for.

Nigel

Thank you all for your company on our most memorable trip; hopefully we can all meet again at the reunion in October.

Malcolm

After nearly 3 years of planning, the whole trip was brilliant and far exceeded my expectations, particularly the Uruguay and Argentina legs; thanks in no small part to everyone in the group and the brilliant people with whom we came into contact.

Serena

Hi Malcolm, just wanted to say a massive thank you for organising the Ajax trip so well. Having visited Montevideo, I feel so much more informed and involved in the history of the Harwood family and the Battle. Visiting the scuttle location and seeing the eagle was a highlight. The memorial services were so moving especially having the Graf Spee Association with us at the Buenos Aires service. It was so nice to meet and get to know so many of the Association members as well as Kirsty and Gavin. I hope you got back home OK and managed to see your extended family over Christmas. Serena.

Louise

We had such a wonderful time from the moment we arrived in Santiago to our finale in Buenos Aires. The whole trip, masterminded by Malcolm and with the best of travel advice from Graham was effortless and so enjoyable for us. Nothing disappointed and there were some great surprises along the way, everything was even better than anticipated! I learnt a lot more about The Battle of the River Plate and feel very proud of my association with this remarkable piece of history, through my grandfather, Captain Woodhouse. It was a privilege to represent HMS AJAX at several embassies and as part of the ceremonies and commemorations in Montevideo and Buenos Aires. I also found it very moving to meet the German counterparts and to have such an interesting and harmonious time with them. For me personally, there was an extra excitement when I found my grandparents' marriage certificate at the Anglican Church in Montevideo and my great-grandfather's grave at the British Cemetery, also in Montevideo. Friday 13th December 2019 will stand out as one of my top memories for ever. Many thanks from the Ashtons to everybody involved.

Chris

What a memorable holiday we shall never forget, so well organised and interesting. We enjoyed every single day and would like to thank all those involved in making it such an unforgettable experience. Special thanks to Malcolm for all his hard work and good planning over the last 3 years – thank you.

Shaun

Peter, I knew the history of the Battle of the River Plate but I didn't truly understand the significance until this trip. Met some new friends and enjoyed unique events that very few will ever have the privilege of experiencing. Truly a once in a lifetime opportunity that I'm so glad Rose and I were able to attend.

Jonathan

As a child I first learnt about the *Graf Spee* and the Battle of the River Plate from my grandmother. Last December, from UK, Germany, Canada and New Zealand we gathered in South America to commemorate this battle that took place 80 years ago and which only a few people can now remember. In each country we visited we discovered that our connections to the battle either through ancestors or the traditions of the Royal Navy are part of a much wider story that still resonates after all these years. We learnt about the neutral participating countries that found themselves unexpectedly pushed onto the international stage in 1939 and of the German sailors forced to make choices when they found themselves interned thousands of miles from home and how they and their descendants have made new lives for themselves. Most of all we learnt of the bravery of all the sailors thrown together in battle and paused to commemorate those who had died. To visit the countries and walk the streets of the cities that my grandfather would have known so well from 1937-40 was very special, as was the opportunity on several occasions to talk to Rudiger and Inge Nedden (formerly Langsdorff).

Peter

From an agenda item 3 years ago to a brilliant conclusion masterminded by Malcolm – an outstanding achievement in the circumstances. To have been part of historical, emotional and national events was beyond my wildest dreams. Our hosts said it was an honour for us to be with them and a theme of reconciliation was at the heart of all the religious services. We were thanked many times for travelling from the United Kingdom to share this 80th anniversary. A truly wonderful trip with good company that produced many happy memories. Thanks to you all for making it so.

Caroline

The Uruguayan part of the trip, especially the commemorative events on the actual Anniversary, made an unrepeatable emotional impact. To find myself in Montevideo 80 years after my grandfather and immersed in the history which he never discussed was unforgettable.

Bob

Wow what an adventure. Prior to this journey I had not been to South America. My purpose of travelling with the Ajax group was to see the 3 countries and to get a flavour of the Battle of the River Plate and the *Graf Spee*.

Highlights of the trip was meeting 40 people that I had not met previously and realising that some of them knew friends that I served with in the Navy. The other major point was how well organised the trip was that the support of funding allowed much more to happen easily without having to ask for contributions for unexpected eventualities. Overall a very memorable experience which I thoroughly enjoyed. Again thank you to everyone for a well organised adventure.

Sandra and Stuart

Just like the song “Once in a Lifetime” 3 years in the planning, 800 photographs, never to be repeated. What an honour to be part of such a historic holiday spent with members from the length and breadth of our country as well as Canada and New Zealand.

As in the song by Freddie Mercury “it was magic”.

Malcolm deserves an OSCAR for his dedication, patience and time in planning this 80th Anniversary and also all the Committee members for their sterling work.