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KCB, CBE

SIR Charles Hughes Hallett was born in 1898. He joined the Navy as a cadet in 1911, and he left it as a Vice-Admiral in 1955, to die thirty years later, still visibly a naval officer of the old school. He was not an easy man to get to know, but his acquaintance was worth acquisition and his friendship, when given, was cherished. But though the eyes could twinkle, their gaze could be frosty and sometimes daunting, and though the personage was always courteous, it was always that of a very commanding officer. He never courted popularity, but there was no pomposity, nothing at all false about him. When he realised that he would not wear his uniform again, he didn't mind using his jacket for odd jobs about the house; and when he had dealt with a matter, that was that. Hence he continually weeded his own packs and left little in the way of papers, except some on deposit in that valuable private venture archive of Mr. Liddle in Sunderland. The major steps in his career were chronicled adequately in the public press. He was not a legendary man, and the few stories told about him are, to various degrees, mainly apocryphal. But he was a good man, and popular with the discerning. The range and number of old shipmates and colleagues who turned up at his memorial service testified to that.

His time as a cadet he said merited no interest except — and his reflections were often acerbic — the modern idea that a boy cannot expect to know his own mind at the age of thirteen is scarcely borne out by the fact that of the 72 cadets in my batch only four left the Navy as cadets because they found it was not the way they wanted to spend their lives. He was mobilised as a cadet and joined the *Vengeance*; four days later he was promoted, and a pair of white flannels was cannibalised to provide the patches for the young gentleman. He was at Gallipoli from the start of the campaign,

1917

and ran a picket-boat off the ANZAC beaches, once victualling a weary General with eggs and bacon fried on her boiler. He was at Jutland in *St. Vincent*, but saw nothing except the breech end of two 12-inch guns which were firing from time to time. He remembered, as a Sub-Lieutenant in the *Hardy*, escorting the first trial convoy of that war — a collection of very elderly merchant ships from Gibraltar to England; luckily nothing occurred, or the anti-convoy party at the Admiralty might have managed to delay the introduction of the convoy system which saved the country from starvation.

It was hard to persuade him to reminisce; his modesty was excessive. But he spoke with affection and pride of Cambridge, to which he went with his surviving contemporaries in 1919 for those terms so felicitously memorialised by Masfield, attributing that University's sporting ascendancy over Oxford to their presence, since the latter had refused to take them. He spoke with nostalgia of the change from broadside to central messing, with contempt of the hire purchase system, which he saw as a root cause of Invergordon, and with respect of Joe Kelly — not a notable tactical or technical expert, but a great seaman and wonderful with personnel — he had a remarkable memory for faces and a habit of making eccentric but memorable remarks.

He qualified at Whale Island in 1925; he had been awarded the Egerton Prize before that. He had a brief but interesting commission as G in the *X1* and attended a senior officers' technical course in 1933 with a relatively unknown F. J. Walker. He had been G of the *Nelson* in the early 30s, and he returned to her in 1938 as SOO and was admired by one of the staff for never interfering in gunnery matters. He was adamant in his opposition to abandoning Scapa Flow in 1939 and confirmed in that

1939

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opinion when, *Nelson* having been mined at Loch Ewe, the staff, on which he was now a Captain, had to shift to the *Warspite* — 'quite a complicated journey terminating at midnight in a recently painted ship whose geography was unknown. Our uniforms and tempers suffered.' Then followed command of the *Curacao*, and two years as a joint planner during which he found himself working with a Colonel who foxed some American visitors by attributing the harmony of their combined staff work to the fact that he and CCHH had had the same nurse as children. Then command of *Implacable*, the last of the big six carriers, and then a tapering career on the flag list in a time of uneasy peace. And then a second career in the City, where the integrity, interest and zeal which had benefited the Service were equally in demand.

He joined *The Naval Review* in 1922. Persuaded as are some from time to time 'because one or two younger members were wanted', he joined the Committee in 1934 as a Lieutenant-Commander — 'I was still on it as a Rear Admiral!' In those days the Committee was rather a metaphysical entity. It never met, but members were used as individual sounding boards by the Editor.

Mythology — for, alas, we have little archival history — maintains that the Committee seldom met until 1951, when he became a Trustee. But there is evidence that in June 1956 he was elected Chairman of the Trustees, though not of the Committee. Sir Aubrey Mansergh said at the time that 'it was essential that with a salaried editor there should be some other authority with whom members could communicate', but continued to chair committee meetings until October 1961 when, for some sadly unrecorded reason, Sir Charles began to chair conjoint meetings as we now have of the Trustees and the Committee. He was again in the chair of the next meeting — three years later — when he seemed a petrifying figure to a newly conscripted Lieutenant RNVR. The three-year cycle has been reduced since then. He resigned as Chairman in 1967 and as a Trustee in 1971,

but he never lost his interest in the *Review*. For sixty years he was a regular contributor of articles and book reviews, his last review appearing in his eighty-eighth year. It was as crisp as ever; his articles were always to the point, and his reviews left a reader in no doubt about the merits — or demerits — of the book under review. His chairmanship had the same incisive quality. He was particularly interested in the education of the naval officer.

Except by reputation, he was probably unknown to the majority of members when he died. I had the good fortune to serve on the Committee under him, and then to meet him at least once a year because of the traditional Armistice weekend with his neighbours. He read the lesson and recited the Legion's exhortation until 1984, and there was no doubt about either. We had the same conversation year after year 'Won't you write down your recollections, Sir?' 'No: not much to record, and it's not likely to interest many people.' Or, 'Would you like to record your reminiscences, Sir — it would save you writing them down?' — 'Wouldn't mind doing that if I thought they'd be of any interest.' And each year's exchange ended in a promise to think about it. But last year, Armistice Sunday came too late for the Admiral: he had been laid low, and soon after, mercifully, he died. But to the end it was not certain how far he had let go. And when the end came, a select group filled the choir of Salisbury Cathedral. CINCNAVHOME was represented. The service was taken by Bishop Brown, once Bishop of Birmingham but lately the Admiral's parish priest, returned from retirement to officiate, having visited his ailing parishioner regularly. It was a cold, wet day, but it was significant how many people and of various ranks and ratings, had travelled a long way to pay their respects.

The basic order of service was comfortably predictable; his niece read the first lesson, his son the second, and his daughter gave a reading from wartime poets with her own commentary. We sang up as he had been known to exhort a

congregation to do; we various recollections afterwards. And now we must not service to the Navy and *Review*. He was in effect Chairman, following the Admiral Thursfield. Though years since he came to a

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SOMEBODY once asked in what way he thought history would have differed rather than J.F. Kenn assassinated. After a moment's inscrutable reflection, he doubted if Aristotle On married Mrs. Kruschev. speculate on the 'ifs' of Nelson had not died at 7 we would give to 2 prominence we do. I commemorate not so much the man whose victory, both, as subjects, have and comprehensively ad years, by many more experts cannot, in the circumstances myself tonight, approach anything but awe.

It is cosy, dining in the shadow of his flagship's (hasn't taken them away) of Nelson's values which Britain great and which lie pride we all feel, not just our Service but in importance to the nation in the place the RN has of the nation. But is it possible for us to accept, uncritically, views on the meaning and importance, and its util

congregation to do; we exchanged our various recollections afterwards.

And now we must not forget his long service to the Navy and to the *Naval Review*. He was in effect our third Chairman, following the Founder and Admiral Thursfield. Though it is fifteen years since he came to a meeting, those of

us who knew him can still with no difficulty recall that steady, penetrating gaze, that frosty look that soon melted if he was satisfied with what was going on, and that encouragement he readily gave — to the deserving.

A.B.S.

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