MY "POWER BOAT" STORY
as told by
Bert Martin

My son Tony made me a present of Adrian Rance's book "Fast Boats and Flying Boats", which was very largely a biography of the once very well-known character, Hubert Scott Paine.
I found it to be a very well written and complete book, which it's author had compiled from a mass of records and letters, and of hearsay which he took to be authentic. Some of it was, and some of it might have been, and some of which I personally knew was 'a bit wide of the mark'.
This is what this account is all about.
The 'I was there' time, and partly of the time when I was not.

To repeat the opening phrase of – 'There were Giants in those days', and in many ways 'Scotty' was such a giant, and with the charisma that went with it. My comment will try to be as fair – but still as accurate – as I possibly can, for he was quite a character.

Now I knew Scotty, and was on talking terms with him, and previous to this, of the accounts of his activities, which were very well newspaper reported at the time.
So that in spite of what the book says, I am in a position to make a true account of the time that I was employed there.
During the 30's I worked at the Power Boat factory at Hythe, which by the time I left I thought employed over 1,000 people. Quite a boat-building yard.

But, to begin at the beginning. As 'a time to live in', the early 30's were quite dreadful times, even in comparison with the previous bad times. When the Great Slump came, as a result of the financial collapse in the USA in 1929, the whole background to our living, which was only just beginning to recover from the quite dreadful WWI and the later devastating effect of the 1926 General Strike, quite literally fell apart, in a handful of days. For financial insecurity has that 'take to the hills!' effect.

It was Government seen as a major calamity, one which required drastic action.
One of these was the realisation that Govt. time would be much better spent, in thinking about the necessary moves to try to deal with the situation, than the more usual pattern of inter-Party bickering. By such a means, and with such an aim, did a 'Coalition' Government arrive, composed – in theory – of Cons, Libs and Labs.

The fact of the matter was that no single Party wanted to hold the now dirty baby at such a time, for obvious reasons. But at the same time, it would be expected of them to 'show concern' and do what they could for the Nation. But the Labs fought shy even of this, for to the best of my memory, only 6 Labs joined the Coalition.

This is worth remembering, for when the living pittance of the 'Dole' was introduced – and there wasn't the money to pay any more – one of its terms was the hated for years after 'Means Test', where an Official Examiner would look around the home and say – you can sell that – where the 'that' was the simplest piece of treasured furniture, or a cheap piano used by a music-learning child. Seen as a 'luxury', and until it was sold into an already-saturated market, the 'dole' would be suitably reduced.

This iniquitous clampdown was used for years after by the Labs, as fuel for their Cons-hating fire, when in fact, had they retained their representation, they would have been faced with the same lack of choice itself. Even so, it was a bitter, soul-depressing thing, on reflection better left undone.
In a few months, nearly ⅓ of the male working population had no jobs. The school-leavers, and the over-40s, absolutely no prospects at all.
Government edicts were made in order to hopefully ensure 'value for money' in all products. Even such a trifle as the inclusion of a cigarette-card, used as a 'quite unnecessary' sales gimmick, and in doing so ensured the depression of many a small child. Whilst as for 'betting' – which was illegal anyway, but ways and means were found to get round it, they put a clamper on the Pools, which had got around the difficulty by means of 'credit' betting, where you sent in your forecast this week, but paid for it on the following week. But now even this was stopped.

Those in 'steady' jobs considered themselves lucky. But their employers were not slow to take battening-down advantage of the situation, as my story will show. This tended to give rise to a sad-faced and frightened look on people, far more than was so during the later savage air-raids, strange to say.
A fear that the unemployment sword of Damocles might fall on them.

Strange to say, the long-term effect of this was to stimulate business, so that certain areas – the Great West Road into London, for example, - went in for factory development on a grand scale, perhaps one largely to the now quiescent labour relations and cheap labour. It meant that the Money side of things was now finding its feet again. But the availability of work did not keep pace with this, for there were still 1½ millions unemployed, out of a total of about 11 millions, when WW2 arrived in 1939.

For those not in regular employment, to 'scratch a living' anywhere, and from any source, was quite a problem. But the youth of the then-times did not resort to break-ins and vandalism, as today's thinking would imagine was inevitable. The general struggle to make any kind of a 'living' over the unprovided for years, right back as far as the Industrial Revolution of the mid-1800's, had produced a lower-level camaraderie, which in our more affluent times is hardly there for the finding of it. Expressible as 'I'm here to cheer you up, and you're here to cheer me up'. And with the automatic assistance that went with it.

One of the side effects of the Govt. clamp-down had its effect on the Supermarine Aviation Company, which had been largely established by Scotty, but who was no longer a part of it, but who was there at their first winning of the Schnieder Trophy, now found that the Govt. funding of their S6-S6B project was now stopped. Fortunately for both the Supermarine and employment, a generous gift from Betty Carstairs – I think it was – enabled them to go ahead, so that Supers could win the Trophy outright, even if it was the Nation itself which took both the accolade and the Trophy.

As an unmarried person, and a contributor to a very large family, for years I tried to make a living on my own doing decorating and signwriting, in this very much saturated market. But I somehow made my way, the trouble being that there were gaps, with nothing coming in. The family requirements on the little bit of tide-over capital I had, finally became intolerable. I felt that – somehow – I would have to get a regular job somewhere.

Now for years my hobby had been making things, chiefly model things, out of metal. So that I thought that I would try my luck as a 'fitter', as a maker of metal detail parts was called. This was probably early in 1937, I can't remember. But it may have been late 1936.

In any case, I went across Southampton Water, and applied for work at The Power Boat Co. I was seen by the fitter-foreman, whose name was Meager, and who is mentioned in the book.

I had taken a pocketful of samples of my work as an introduction. He said – "that's alright, but can you make them in a reasonable time?" To which I replied," I'm sure I can, and I can show you if you give me a chance." He said, "alright, start next Monday." I asked," what's the rate?" He said "1shilling and 4 pence (6.7p)." I said, "No it isn't, the Port Rate (as it was called) is 1shilling and 5 pence halfpenny (7.3p)." "Oh," he said. "We can get all the labour we want at 1 and 4 (as it was said)."

And so 1 shilling and fourpence it was, for a 48 hour working week, which was 3 pounds, 4 shillings in the then-money, or £3.20 in the present money. But after subtractions, which did not include Income Tax, this was down to 2 pounds 15 shillings, or £2,75 in our present money. Hardly a fortune, and out of which I had to find my longish journey fare and my £6 p.a. income tax.

I must pause here in order to put the Adrian Berry record straight. For the Power Boat was known as 'the hire 'em and fire 'em Company', the reason for which was quite different from the Berry version, who gave the impression that when Scotty took on labour he had to show them how to do it, and those who found difficulty in doing it had to be fired. I nearly fell out of my chair laughing when I read this, for the reality was vastly different as I will later show. In those days, if you didn't already have the necessary skill, then you didn't even start.

Another thing I found humorous was the very idea of a 'St. Christopher' type of brought-around resuscitating tea. Most certainly not in my time there, and even the making of tea was firm-illegal. A story about which will follow.
There was nothing at all 'kind and considerate' in the attitude of the management of the Power Boat, at least during my own tenure there. As for 'tea breaks' themselves, this was instituted as a concession to the Trades Unions as a 'sop' during WW2. They didn't factory-exist before.

The Fitting Shop was 3rd floor up, and of some length and some width. It was both airy and well-lit, with a greenhouse-style of Foreman's Office at the top of the iron stairs, and where the toilets were on the floor below. In factory terms the place was ultra-modern.

The toilets were CLEAN, very clean, and totally free from graffiti. But they were also a bit stark, with the cubicles very much in the same style of the Minoans of some 4,000 years previously. For the 'door' was a half-door of about 3 feet, with a gap of about 18 inches beneath it. Not much privacy in the 'privvy', and the seats were just boards situated about a half-round channel of flowing water.
The sky-larking apprentices would make hat-style paper boats, set them on fire and launch them down the channel. It was a hazard that one had to guard against, and seeing that smoking was not tolerated in the workshop, it was hard to draw a breath in the toilets.

As for the workshop itself, it was unbelievably clean, with the floor being wet-mopped all over, overnight. This meant that nothing was allowed to be left resting on the floor, however large. Things had to be lifted onto the box-type benches, which were equipped with front flaps.

As for Foreman Meager, he was tall and as thin as a rake, and since he had a glass eye, he was also known as 'Popeye' Meager, for the celebrated cartoon character had just been invented at that time. He had a 'haunted' frightened appearance, and was an 'unsmiling overseer', rigorously so, as most Foremen were at such times. And this was but a handed-on reflectance of those above them, who literally ruled by abusive, arrogant and irrational sheer bad temper.

This was common to all the major factories of the time. The Supermarine was a typical iron-fisted example, where one clocked off to go to the toilet, and if the day's total exceeded 5 minutes, then they wanted to know why.
Later on in my Power Boat experience, I was employed in the hallowed 'Secret Shop', which had no inside toilet for security reasons. One had to 'sign out' at the Doorkeeper's office, and sign back in! I myself didn't smoke at the time, but as you can see, a 'quick drag' was very much so.

Everything was done on a 'price piecework' system, where an item price value was written on the card, the idea being that if you worked flat-out you could make 'time and a third', which came out at about 4d per hour, on top of your basic pay.
I myself have always been a fast worker, but even so, there were times when I couldn't even make 'time', never mind the extra third. If by some chance you could find a quick method which came out at time-and-a-half or more, then the next time the job was shop-loaded, the price would be suitably lower-adjusted. So that to personally win the day, was at the same time to tighten the noose around the next unfortunate worker's neck.

The Ratefixer carried around a veritable Doomsday-size book, inside which was a record of the time taken previously on every job. Some of the prices given for new work were ridiculous, but he wouldn't listen to reason.

We found our own way of dealing with his intransigence. On one particular complex job there was clearly not less than 8 hours steady work. But his price was 6. As soon as he had left, a group of 6 of us dropped what we were doing, and fairly tore into the job, which at the end we had to electro-plate, and hand-fit every ballrace.
Exactly 1 hour later, the 'bod' concerned carried the complete, fairly large article into the ratefixer's office and said, "There you are, call yourself a ratefixer, giving me 6 hours for a silly little job like that".

This was a clever move which really 'got' the Ratefixer. For the time – and his apparent gross over-estimation, had to go down in his record book, and this spelt trouble for him as it was supposed to do.
But we had made our point, and from then on we had a more sympathetic ear.

There was a male booking-on clerk, where the old card was handed in, and the following card issued. Each worker had his own page, and if the job had been completed in time, or less, then the entry was made in black ink, but if it was 'over the top', it would go down in RED ink.

Every so often these books were inspected by the upper management, after which a fair percentage of the workforce would find their notice, as well as their pay, in the next pay-packet. So that, if one noticed that a familiar face didn't seem to be there any more, one's companion would say, "Oh! He 'fell through the sieve", as it was called.

The going was ruthless, totally ruthless, and I will ask my reader to compare this with Rance's statement that "Scotty was insistent that good work came from contented employees".
If a boat gave trouble on it's 8-hour test then the maker of the trouble part was due for the immediate 'high jump' with his 'Cards' and 4 hours pay, unless he could prove that it wasn't his fault.

I remember one such case, where a throttle-butterfly was sucked off, but the fitter was able to demonstrate that, although he had spread the split-pins in the approved fashion, the 'drag' was enough to close them up again, after which the gaps were filled with solder, and the fitter could breathe again. At least for the time being …

It has to be admitted that this system of unrelenting utter ruthlessness did tend to make the workforce more closely watch everything they did, than they otherwise might have done. But at what a price in human background fear. Nor was second- hand mercy shown anywhere, and there was no one to appeal to.

Another such case comes to mind, which occurred during the night, at a time when our little group was all on its own. We were making a stainless steel and manganese-bronze torpedo launching chassis. One of the gang drilled and reamed a largish pivot-pin hole, only to find when he separated it that there was no 'meat' on the outside of the tongue-part hole. He was absolutely prostrate with fear of what would inevitably come next day.
The sack, with absolutely no chance of finding another job in order to look after his family.
But there were only a few of us there to know about it, and we each and all set to in order to put things right. I myself was a dab hand with a brazing torch. The offending holes were plugged and flushed-off and the hole re-drilled in the proper place, and it was 'as good as new' from a strength point of view.
The unfortunate perpetrator couldn't believe his good luck.
It was that kind of harsh background, and nothing else was expected to be there.

There was no regular 'night shift' at the Power Boat, and to be on torpedo-tube manufacture - we made and fitted a set of 4 to each craft – was at the same time, to be subject to heavy demands.
Due to 'teething troubles' with their design, these were way behind and holding up delivery.

In order to meet this emergency, when you 'knocked off' from your day's work you were told that you would be expected to carry on through the night, with a statutory 20 minute break every 4 hours.
This was contrary to the Trades Union Rule Book, which said that members would have to forfeit all pay after midnight to the Union. I myself wasn't in the Union, but I never knew of any such forfeiture from those who were.
All day, plus all night was bad enough, but you were then expected to carry on as normal right through the next day, and a few 7-day weeks, plus a few of these all-nights, reduced our particular gang to a set of zombies.
But since Scotty – as the book makes clear – thought in terms of 'take it or leave it', unless we were prepared to chuck our hand in, in those work-poverty times, then we had little choice but to take it.

On one particular midnight session, we had a visit from Scotty – the Big Man himself.
I have always shown respect to any 'upper', but never deference, and I have to say that it seemed to work, in that they soon realised that they couldn't, by being over-bearing, get the better of you, that you were both on some kind of equal terms.
No matter at what factory I happened to be working, the particular Big Man always seemed to respect me, perhaps because of my unfrightenable nature. Most 'bombast' is sheer bluff, and if it doesn't work – and you remain cool – they have to come to some kind of terms.
It was so in this case. For the firm had taken on so many new orders, that the delivery times were 6 months behind. I can only imagine that on this particular occasion it 'rankled' him so much that he thought that he had to ginger things up a bit.

Scotty was a big-made, heavy man, and his footsteps clanged on the stairs as he came up, unmistakingly so. Then he started, and the expletives in his tirade would have put the proverbial Billingsgate fish-porter to shame.
I simply waited for him to run out of breath, to then quietly ask him, what more could we do, other than a fair day's reliable work? And in this case with all nights thrown in as well.
It so happened that I had another card to play, for I said that the last time you spoke to us, you promised us a special bonus, and we haven't seen hide nor hair of it.
He said, "Didn't you get it? I'll soon put that right", which he did.
In our next pay-packet we found that the money was £10 over the top, totally without any record of it, and there were other Scotty meet-ups, for if after a trial trip the engine carburettors required synchronising due to drift-off, then a person such as myself would be detailed to do it. A most difficult job, since it was under the floor, and the room temperature almost too hot to breathe.
But when I arrived at the end of the long jetty, it was Scotty introduced me by name to the 'scrambled egg' Naval Brass Hats of the acceptance squad.

On another occasion I was walking back through town one evening, still in my working clothes, when who should pass by but Scotty, in his Rolls, and complete with his female bevy.
He pulled up and had quite a conversation about nothing in particular with me, and I have to say that I admired such classlessness in any employer. From my own point of view I could 'live' on the same mental plane with him. How he treated others was entirely a separate issue.

When I first went there, the 'canteen' was a dimly lit, high wooden barn of a place, just like something out of a Wild West film. You couldn't get near the counter, due to the layers of backs, and you could hardly see through the smoke, for the smoke deprived workers couldn't wait to light up.
It was run by a frantically working 'dear old soul', Mrs Yurren, and no prizes will be offered to those who guess what this was popularly converted into. I can see her now dashing about, with sweat pouring down her face, as it was with her assistants.

But all of this was to change, and a highly-modern canteen was built, with plenty of light, plenty of tables, good service and a stage. It was on this stage that the official 'opener' of the new canteen, Sir Kingsley Wood, as in the words of the book, that the apprentices at the factory presented the visitor with a scale model of the Rolls-Royce Power Merlin marine engine.
Whoever witnessed this, it certainly wasn't me, for the reality of it was quite different.

Scale models of Power Boats, as a world-distributed sales gimmick, were being made all the time, and four model-makers were employed for just such a task. But every so often, when they fell behind, I was commissioned to make sets of the metal bits for them.
This was 'just up my street', for I had a flair for just such a thing, and not only that, I could silver-solder, which they couldn't. I could put a neatness on my bits that wasn't on theirs.

I found myself presented with a couple of cast lumps, and an instruction to make two silver-plated models of the Rolls-Royce engine/Meadows Gearbox combination.
Those engines were quite complicated, highly-detailed things. Not only that, but everything had to be detachable for plating. They couldn't make the 48 tiny spark-plugs I required, so they paid me to make them at home. It was a long, hard job, very much hounded by Popeye Meager, but there was no way in which it could be speeded, and in any case they met the deadline.
If I say it myself, they looked quite beautiful in their glass cases.

The presentation of one of these by Scotty himself, was the highlight of the stage-speech occasion, and when it was handed over it was said that it had been made by the apprentices.
All I can say is that I didn't join in with the clapping. I wonder why?

Another thing which needs to be mentioned, is the book inference that Scotty invented the rubber water-immersed shaft bearings. Did he?
I seem to remember that when I fitted them, I took them out of a box marked "The Cutlass Bearing Co".
Was I mistaken in this?
By the way, I understood that the other model was presented to the Manager of Rolls-Royce. But no one at any level ever said a word of either praise or thanks to me.

Pilfering was made almost impossible at the P.B. For on leaving, everyone with a case had to walk through the gatehouse, with it wide open.
The others had to squeeze between a lined-up row of gate police, where about 1 in every 20 was shoulder-tapped to be frisked in the gatehouse.
This became so onerous that some workers complained that they were being picked on by the shoulder-tappers, and in order to test the legitimacy of their claim, the name and works number of the individual was written down in a book. But this in itself added to the time-tedium of the waiting queue, who in some cases had to catch the adjacent train. It annoyed them, and very much so.
On one such occasion, when asked his name and number the man in front of me said, 'W. Norman, Ten sixty-six', and it all went down in the book!
They extended the idea of 'secrecy' to the ridiculous.
We learnt that an apprentice draughtsman was to be prosecuted at the Old Bailey under the Official Secrets Act, for 'stealing' a works drawing.
His case was that he had only borrowed it to copy it's layout style.
When the very sensible judge saw the drawing itself, he was supposed to have said, "What on earth could be said to be 'secret' about that?". Even the drawing of a bent piece of pipe would be block-stamped 'Secret and Confidential' and needless to say, due to the unfavourable publicity, they daren't fire him. Otherwise they would.

I will pause here to remark that in my time I have seen the pendulum swing both ways, and didn't like either of them.

Ranging from the Simon Legree cotton plantation style of employee-subjugation that I have described here - which the book fondly imagined was a happy-hunting ground of contented workers - to a situation whereby Union-Godfather clampdown.
I was not allowed to work, and got so fed-up with doing 'homers' that I eventually gave notice.
It is a case of where either side will take full advantage of the very climate itself, and some 'reform' or legislation should be introduced so that neither side can seize the advantage.
It can be done, and the aim should be that of a team of truly contented workers – if such a thing is ever fully possible.

The torpedo-tubes that I mentioned were 18 inches in diameter, and about 18 feet long, with 4 sets per boat. They were made from welded 1/8 inch thick steel plate, welded together from sections. Some of this weld projected inside, and had to be ground off. This was done by a workman – me for instance – with their arms stretched out in front of them to hold the portable grinder, laying on a rope-pulled through mat, complete with goggles, face mask, airline and electric lamp. All manipulated by the stretched out arms.
Those seams took quite a bit of grinding back, and a few hours of that kind of work was all that anyone could stand. The necessary airline had to be set to a trickle in order to keep the grinding dust-low, but even so, we got in quite a pickle. Shifting, or 'coming out' signals were made by tapping one's heels on the tube. Not the best way of earning one's living.

This was bad enough, but there was worse. The torpedoes were blown out by cordite, and when on test 'just the right amount' had to be determined. Too much and either the tube sheared off it's stainless steel holding-down bolts in their manganese-bronze castings, or the back end blew off, or both.
Too little, and the 'torp' tipped up as it came out, remaining partly in the tube, which it bent.

Getting the sheared-bolts out of the castings was all but impossible, but the task of straightening a bent tube was a bit of a nightmare.
Imagine me inside the confine of a tube which fairly reeked or cordite, supporting a huge iron 'dolly' as best as I could, whilst someone outside was flogging it with a sledgehammer! Jobs couldnt be much worse than that. But we did manage to straighten the tube.
These were deck-mounted by us, on a swivelling cradle, cushioned by a pair of 'oleo' ole-and-air cylinders. These gave a lot of experimental trouble.
They had torpedo-boat orders from the Admiralty, from Holland and from Sweden, in addition to the one which was being hopefully built for the USA. Each and all of these countries had their own version of a torpedo.
In the main they weighed about 1¼ tons, and the 'warheads' were painted, red if live, but yellow if a dummy.
There was a reason for this, for after their test-firing out in Southampton Water, they were supposed to float end-upwards, like a marker buoy for their recovery, but some of them stuck nose-down in the mud, and had to be 'trawled' for.

Now of course, empty tubes had to be loaded, after a mackintoshed individual had been pulled through, well greasing the tube as he went.
The day came when I was a member of a 4-gang, who were trying to load a torpedo from a 'flat' alongside. This was not without its problems.

We set up a pair of overhanging sheer-legs, and started to chain hoist it.
At the time when it was just about level with the boat deck, I looked sideways to notice a cross-channel steamer coming up.
They raised a 3 foot swell behind them – enough to stand our sideways-on cockleshell on its beam ends.
I shouted a warning to my mates, and lay flat on the deck.
The 'torp' swung inboard like a huge pendulum. 'Hold it', someone shouted, but it was a case of every man for himself, for the boat itself was swinging over and back, with almost nothing to catch hold of. CRASH went the torpedo into the deckhouse, only to come back for another, and yet another go, shattering it. In time we actually did manage to rope the wild steer, and then, with great difficulty, tube-load it.
They never tried such a thing again at sea.
To my way of thinking, too little attention had been paid to the very loading of the torpedo's, for the deck itself wouldn't stand much weight.
Incidentally, the 'skin' of the upper deckhouse was plywood, only a millimetre thick, and when I asked one of the Naval bods if they were happy with this, to my surprise he said very much so, for both the incendiary and the explosive bullets would pass right through and out the other side, without going off.

Scotty was a great showman, one who never missed an opportunity, so that if a newly commissioned liner came up the river, you couldn't see the water for the Power Boat escort, and the entire works would be outside waving them in.
I am all for this demonstration-celebration. We have too little of it in life these days. The sense of 'values' seems to have juvenile-changed.

It was the same with the national 'heroes' of the time, the Henry Segraves, and the Malcolm Campbells, and so on.
These people were fairly lionised at the time, and helped to put 'National pride in people', now seen as a dirty work thing of the past. But 'people do not live on bread alone', as the saying goes.
They can only truly 'live' when there is inspiration.

The 'Target Boats' were mentioned.
As I made a full set of the metal parts of these in model form, I had to do a lot of measuring-up in order to do it.
The book goes out of its way to eulogise the work of T E Lawrence 'of Arabia' in this work, but this was over-and-done-with before my Power Boat time.
The boats were made in box-section form, and to me looked as though they were filled with ordinary ping-pong balls. I understood that they were aircraft 'bombed' with 7lb bags of ordinary flour.
These made so much crash on the roof that it stunned the occupants, who after that had to wear tank-type helmets.

Popular hearsay at the time, said that after an evenings 'roistering', the works Foremen descended en masse at the factory gate, and demanded to be let in, which the Gatekeeper did.
After which, they were said to have broached the ample supplies of liquor that were held in the store, and got plastered. The story then went that they were all fired the next day, but that after a month had passed, with production now in chaos, they were all taken back on.

To now mention the boats themselves.
Anyone found on the varnished deck of a boat, in anything other than rope sandals – available from the stores – was instantly sacked.
The boats had to be nose-moored a long way out in the river since the water is shallow. If you had to board one, you went out in a pinnace which did not hold to the boat, it held off with a pair of mops, one at each end, in order not to mark the paintwork, after which you leaped on board, often with nothing to hold onto other than a shallow gunwale.

The 60 and 70'foot boats drew about 3 feet of water at the stern, and very little at the bow, so that when they were nose-tethered – so that they could turn with the tide – they bobbed about like corks in anything like a breeze.
If it was gusting hard sometimes the deck would be 3 feet above you and at others 3 feet below, plus the pitching about of the boat you were on, at which times you had to wait your opportunity and LEAP, aiming to arrive spreadeagled on the deck.
Sometimes it was quite a hazardous adventure, but at no time did I ever 'miss the boat', and land in the water.
When you had finished whatever it was that you were sent out to do, you pressed a klaxon horn to tell them to come out for you. In the summer there was something 'quite nice' about being out there on the water, so that there were times when the Klaxon-pressing was a bit tardy.

In the Winter, and if the weather was bad, it was anything but nice, and with no engine running, there was no heat in the boat, particularly noticeable when the sun was not shining.
Things were quite different when the boat was on the move, for they were as steady as a rock, even in a fairish sea.
On Sundays the works itself wasn't open, but the 'torp' gangs had to go in, at a time when no transport was available. At such times they sent over a 3-well 36-footer, which I seem to remember was called the 'Commodore'. That boat could really 'open-up and go', and the noise from the floor, as it went over every wave, was enough to deafen you, but very exhilarating.

I was on the 60-footers, which had 3 'Lion' engines, and the 70-footers, which had 3 'Merlin' engines. When flat-out, or even ¾ throttle over a long period – which was standard – the 'engine rooms' of these were too hot to live in, fully equipped with dials that no one was there to read.
The ventilation of the 70-footers was still being looked into at the time I finally left, but if one could 'live' with all these drawbacks – which is easy when one is young – then the sheer thrill of it was something that one would never forget.

The firm would send a 16-footer over to the Town Quay, in order to collect items, and sitting outside the factory at lunch-break times, we would idly watch the coming and going of this boat.
On one occasion it caught fire when it was about half-way over, at which the man on board got busy with the fire extinguisher. When it was empty and the boat still blazing away, he had little option but to jump overboard and wait to be picked up. I was told that this was liable to happen with a particular petrol engine on the boat, but when they changed to a 106 HP Gardner diesel, the trouble ceased.

Scotty was proud of his clean, tidy factory, as well he might be, and we were given a pair of while boiler suits, as the book says, one to wear, and one in the wash – OUR wash. By Friday, black grease took quite a bit of getting out, but on Mondays we were white, largely because we were 'on show' to the general public as an example of 'how things should be run' in a factory. But some of us were not too keen at being used as exhibition pieces.

Our workshop was very well thought out from an efficiency and tidiness point of view, with piped-in gas, oxygen and acetylene, besides an airline, and I can tell you that when your head isn't feeling too good, a sniff of oxygen is of great benefit, whilst an airline in one's shoe will keep the foot cool.

As I mentioned before, there were neither tea breaks nor tea making allowed.
The book reference to such a provision is presented in such a way that it gives the reader the impression that this was an early-on Scotty benevolence, but this could only have referred to the WW2 years.
Mankind is a cunning creature, and quite good at dealing with prison-imposed problems, as shown in many a 'stalag' film.
We made tea, twice a day, and I myself boiled every bit of the necessary water. It was getting the water which presented the major problem.

I will pause here to mention that in later life I met up with Meager on very convivial terms.
It is largely the harassing climate that tends to bring out the worst in people, literally make them into something that they would normally not be.
I asked him to answer me truthfully – did he ever know that we made tea twice a day? He said, no, he didn't have an inkling of it.

So how was it done? It was quite literally one of combined operations.
The water was on the floor below, and there was the open-door Foreman's office right alongside the top of the stairs. In those days every factory worker had a 'billican' holding about a pint, and the apprentices would hold 6 of these in each hand, and sneak around the back of the benches, to be as near as possible to the top of the stairs without being seen. They then had to await the signal.
Now, in a largish fitting shop, there is hammering of various kinds going on all the time, as a sort of background music. One of the fitters who was a fair way up the shop, would find himself in some kind of difficulty at a very convenient time, which required the Formans advice.
The Foreman would leave his office in order to look into it, at which time the signal would be hammer sent-out, in a sort of Morse code, bang, bang, bang - - bang, precisely spaced and delivered.
Whereupon, the Aquarius-types would dash down the stairs and fill up, to then await exactly the same signal for their return, and it worked, every time.
I looked after a mass of gas-rings at the end of the shop, that could boil the whole lot, in about two minutes, after which the billycans were passed from hand to hand, at the wall end of the benches, to be suitably looked after by the participants.
It is that kind of co-operation which makes a family feeling in a workshop.

If anything was required from the stores, which were on the ground floor, it was the job of a 'runner' to get it for you, for you weren't allowed out of your own department.
I myself was privileged in this respect, for being a model-maker I required access to the prototype. These runners wore deep red 'siren suits' and mop caps, usually very polite and obliging people. One of the fitters was a pocket-chess player, where his 'oppo' worked in the machine shop below.

He would frown-make his move, and the girl would then take the folder down to his opponent, and later on the same day she would bring it back. The fact that a game took months didn't matter.
At least it was very deliberately played and that is what the game of chess is all about.
Going up and downstairs all day must have been a tiring job for those girls. There were some tasks that require more endurance than physical strength.

I quote once again – Scotty was insistent that good work came from contented employees.
Where on earth did Rance get that idea from? I myself did 'good work' for that has always been my style.
But was I contented? Should I have been, in view of the totally undecorated stories of my experience there?

Consider this. Late one afternoon Meager said to a very capable fitter – not asked him – "I want you back after tea." The fitter replied, " I can't possibly do that for I have to visit a relation in hospital."
Meager said, " I'll say to you once again, I want you back after tea."
To which the fitter replied, "I simply can't". Meager asked, " Is that your last word"? The man nodded.

Fifteen minutes later Meager arrived back with his cards, his pay, with 4 hours added in lieu of his notice.
He was given a gate pass and told to leave immediately.
To now ask my reader, how could we possible live with this totally inconsiderate thing, and rest contented with it?
This account is my first-hand seeing of it, it is not hearsay. The question has to be asked, was this sheer vindictiveness on Meager's personal part, or was it but an illustration of Scotty's directive of the firm's policy?
In my seeing of both this and other things, it was the latter. Meager was but a minion of the law.

Scotty's treatment of the brilliant Fred Cooper and Tony Quelch, and the willing Tom Parfitt, as recorded in the book, reveal all too clearly that he was totally inconsiderate of the feelings of anyone under him. They were there to be used, as far as it is humanly – not humanely – possible, and beyond that to breaking point. Nothing nor anybody would be allowed to stand in his way.
"If you don't like it, you know what you can do. And I can soon replace you".

If this had been written over the factory entrance, it couldn't have been more generally applicable, but whether he 'mellowed' in his later life – as some do – I have no idea.
All I can say is that my version of the 'Hire 'em and Fire 'em' reputation is the real one, and the book version of it is wrong.

He had a quite wonderful collection of engines, as far back as they go. But every one of these went for scrap when hostilities were near. It nearly broke my heart to see such mechanical history go.

But how and why did I finally leave the place?
It went like this.
I was in charge of the 4-man torpedo-tube gang, as but one of several, every one of whom was paid full rate, whereas I myself was still on 1/4d.
I had complained about this anomaly to Meager on many occasions, but got nowhere.
Nothing was going to change his reputation of, Meager by name, meagre by nature.

The very much anticipated war broke out, and a notice appeared down below which read, "No further requests for an increase in pay will be entertained".
I immediately asked Meager, "does that apply to me?" He replied, "you can read can't you?" and I said, "Perfectly, if I'm in at all on Monday it won't be until the afternoon."

I went down to Follands at Hamble, and was accepted to start as a toolmaker, to then give Meager a week's notice, totally without other comment.
Half an hour later, he came back and asked, would another 3d make you change your mind? and I told him that it wouldn't. He later came back with an offer of 6d, and later still one of 9d, which was well above the Folland offering.
But I was so bitter about the whole background to my job, and the total lack of any recognition or appreciation, that I had made my mind up to go, and go I went.
Very sad to leave my dear companions and friends, but in no sense sad to leave the Power Boat behind. I can truthfully say that I never left any firm that I didn't leave a bit of me behind.

Having said which, I also have to say that there is something about a boat-yard and what goes with it,that has a charm of its own. one which defies description.

One of those I left behind was my bench-companion Bert Thomas, who had served in the Royal Flying Corps as a pilot in WW1. He had many an interesting tale to tell, and the mere fact that he came back intact after a long time spent on the Western Front, shows that not all of those '20 Minutes to live' stories of pilot-life-expectation, are correct.
The horse's mouth is a far more reliable source than book-selling and film-making exaggerated dream-ups.
Or so I have listening-ear found.

To now pass comment on the boats themselves.
The very style was 'just about right' on the 37-foot 6' types, widely used in WW2, but I wasn't very 'struck' with the concept of the 2-torpedo 60-footers, in which a gantry-frame was extended over the stern, along which the hull-stored torpedo travelled back to a stop, and then fell into the water.
After which the main concern of the captain was to get out of the way of his under-passing torpedo.

The 70-footer carried 4 torpedoes on deck, but to me the whole structure was a bit on the weak side. When a jack was used under the keel in order to change the cradle, it went up about 5 inches before any daylight appeared at the cradle.
They were 'a bit on the flexible side', which on a 'hard chine' or 'bottom sharp corner' boats would put a strain on the gussets.

I formed the opinion, which was right as it later transpired, that the bull was not sturdy enough for 'open sea'.
The Yanks thought the same, and whilst using the same basic profile concept, produced the larger, heavier and far more useful P.T. boats, which – as far as I know, did yeoman work besides looking very graceful, as a legacy from Scotty's version of the same thing.
They perfected the design, made it more practical.

I wasn't at all happy with the 70-footers tube launching arrangement.
It was very much on the flimsy side, whilst as shock-absorbers, the oleo legs were not easy to cross-match, and themselves put a strain on the cradle.
You can't work on the development of these things without realising where their weaknesses lay.
Fixed tubes, in a much sturdier hull, would have been a much better idea. Some things can be 'a bit too clever' not to give trouble, but this was a design defect, and nothing to do with the workmanship.

What either the Scotty version or the PT version did in the way of a menace towards the enemy, is not recorded in Rance's book. How useful they made themselves felt as a naval attack weapon, I would very much like to know.

One of my given jobs at the Power Boat was to make a set of mast-top 'mascots' for the Malta squadron, the Flotilla Leader of which I knew quite well. I had an entirely free hand in this, to do what I liked, and what I did they were very pleased with. Everyone was different, and they were all made on 'weathercock' lines, freely pivoted to swing round in the wind.
That for the leader was a torpedo, whilst the others were N.S.E.W., complete with pointing arrow, fox in full flight, 5-finger devil, and so on. I found it a very pleasing outlet for whatever artistic skill I possessed. In that sense it wasn't 'work' at all, it was sheer pleasure.

Due to my natural capability and width of its application, I had a very busy and varied life at the Power Boat, much more so than was the lot of the average worker there.
In my own words of it, 'I lived a lot of life' there, every kind of it, for not all life is strung out in the form of a single time-passing string. We live, or can live, several types of life at one and the same time. It is in terms of the cotton of it, the string of it, the rope or even cable of it, that is the measure of what we put into our living as such, rather than our 'life' which was based on but the time-passing of it.

The money reward, essential though it is, is very much a secondary aspect at such a time. It's deficiency in this respect was well compensated for by the very experience, and the variety of my life whilst I was there. But not the 'inside the tube' part of such an experience. For a 'sense of confinement' doesn't come much worse.

In this account I have tried to put across the human side of the British Power Boat Co, to my reader, whereas the Rance book is centred around a single identity, to and from which all the others, and all the rest are but ancillaries. What we read is his version of Scotty's principles, which does not tally with that of mine. And so now try to sum-up.

He was leader in a commercial world which is now suffering from a lack of them. He had both the drive and the ambition, perhaps too much of this for his own good, for he tried to get on, faster than he could make firm stepping stones.
He went straight into production with things which should have been type-tested. He was a little too good at getting orders. The sheer ever-increasing load on his staff and worker's backs tended to destroy the efficiency, rather than improve it. And the 'crack of the whip' with discretion.

I would sum him up as a powerful engine, but one without brakes. A man with determination to succeed at all costs, both to himself and those who worked for him.
This story could have been different, if only he had taught himself how to delegate work. To leave things totally to others, without wanting to 'know better' all the time.

My story is totally different from that of Rance, which to me presented a story of a man who found that others could not keep up with him. It was more that they couldn't keep up with his unreasonable expectations. No one could. But in this account I have tried to be as fair as I could be, in the tale of my experience of him, which may not be the same as that of others.

He was a hard man, a product of equally hard times, when this sort of thing was the 'done thing', and as such, not seen to be out of context. He made work at a time when Britain badly needed such work. Even myself. Which in it's way is epitaph enough.

To end on a more humorous notem for no situation, however bad, is not without it's humour.
As the Torpedo Boats were finished, they were equipped with a pair of gun-turrets.
Air-operated machine gun turrets on the British ones, but electrically operated cannon ones on the foreigners.
The air-operated ones were somewhat jerky with their swivel and elevating actions. In contrast to which the 'electrics' were beautifully smooth.
Both of the types were 'run in' by apprentices, who were 'tickled pink' with the sense of power that it gave them.
As they elevated and swivelled and aimed, so the expression of 'fierce face with clenched teeth' would have done credit to any Red Baron film, or the face of Lew Ayres in 'The Dawn Patrol' film.
And who or what did they seem to be constantly aiming at? any Foreman who happened to be in sight. Only the empty breeches kept Meager alive.
It would seem that, joking apart, it did them good to 'let off steam' in such a way. For the lot of a the apprentice was a hard one. At the age of 20 they were still being paid under a pound a week for doing work every bit as good, and every bit as fast, as the others.
S Rance's impression of a considerate help towards these apprentices, should be seen in such a more correct light. For they had need of any such help. Their wage packet saw to that.

Looking back it's a wonder that I stuck it out as long as I did. But no one knows whether our lives are fore-ordained or not. At least it enabled me to write this record of those times, and the social background to such times. Not from the hearsay of yesterday people, but an 'I was there',

Alas! Poor Scotty. I knew you well, including the better part of you, where so many only saw the harsher side of you. You were a man who Made Fire, in a world which was in need of such a fire. But like all fires, it was destined to scorch others, but also to burn away the lighter of it.

From what I know of him I would imagine that in the end he fully realised this.
What does it profit a man if he wins every race in life, but loses his family background, so many of his once-friends, and his respect by others?.
I feel that there was a better man there for the shaping of it.
But he was too big, in every respect, to even consider that he might be wrong.
I admired the better part of Scotty, and I found such a part.
'There were Giants in those days'.
And there are so few of them now.

Why should I say this?
Because it has to be realised that in spite of the rigour of it, and perhaps because of it, it was the Scotty types who made Britain what it was and gave it the respect it once had, and the lack of them which made GB what it is now, or isn't.

Bert Martin, second from left, holding the Scott Paine Midel Power Boat Trophy. Southampton Common about 1949.

Mr. A. W. Martin, of the Southampton Model Power Boat Club, with his flash steam hydroplane "Tornado II," fitted with coil boiler single blow-lamp, and single-cylinder piston valve uniflow engine. Weight 4 lbs., speed 24 m.p.h.