

Doing its bit

YACHTING MONTHLY & RNVR JOURNAL

1939 - 1945



On the 80th anniversary of the start of the Second World War, Julia Jones looks back at Yachting Monthly's relationship with the RNVR

The young men who signed up for war service in September 1939 are centenarians now – and almost all are gone. Many of the older men they served alongside were veterans of the First World War, as was *Yachting Monthly*, which was founded in 1906. During the 1914-18 war, the magazine had taken on an additional identity serving as the *Journal of the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve*. (One can only assume it must have lied about its age.)

On its 34th birthday, in May 1940, *YM* signed up again, changing its name from *Yachting Monthly & Motor Cruising* to *Yachting Monthly & RNVR Journal*. Its editor wrote: 'In the interval since the Armistice, methods of waging war may have changed, ways of dealing

with the menace have certainly altered, yet the same kinds of ships are pressed once more into service, the same names recur in action, and much the same duties are being carried out by officers of the RNVR as their fathers performed over twenty years ago.'

Developments over the next few years would show this to be a massive understatement. The role of the RNVR – and the yachting community from which it sprang – was far more significant in the Second World War than it had been in the first, as the evacuation from Dunkirk would very soon demonstrate. Women also played a much more active part, though no one mentioned publicly

that *YM* itself was being edited by a woman – Kathleen Palmer.

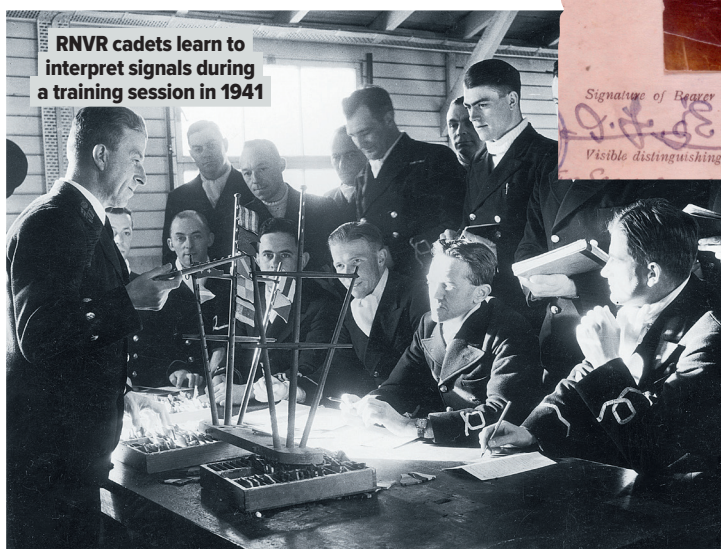
The declaration of war in September 1939 had not come as such a shock as in August 1914. The RNVR was already a well-established organisation with half a dozen centres across the UK offering regular drills, training opportunities and uniforms. Most inter-war yachtsmen however, wanted to go sailing in their free time, not drilling. As naval rearmament gathered pace from the mid-1930s the Admiralty had begun to

wonder how they were going to staff their new ships. A supplementary reserve – the RNVSR – was created primarily for yachtsmen. All that was asked was a commitment to serve in an emergency. Volunteers would have to buy their

own uniforms and organise their own training but they wouldn't have to march up and down some distant drill hall on a Friday evening

when they wanted to get to the river.

YM's editor, Maurice Griffiths, expressed some reservations but signed up anyway. So did Norman Clarkson (*YM*'s general manager), many of the regular contributors and hundreds of its readers. Two thousand sailing enthusiasts had joined before the list was closed – a response that generated some administrative problems. In the wake of the September 1938 Munich Crisis, the Admiralty started looking for



RNVR cadets learn to interpret signals during a training session in 1941



YM columnist Jack Jones was called to duty in 1941

Training continues for the RNVR officers



The wedding of YM's editor was reported in the magazine

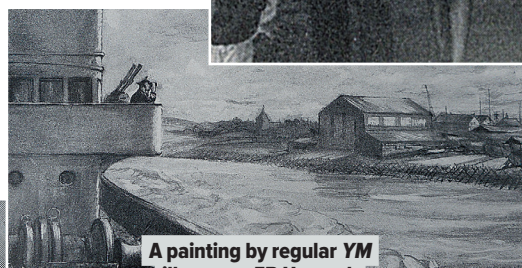


supplementaries to support their supplementaries and appealed for yachtsmen who were bank clerks or accountants to volunteer for the supply branch of the RNVR.

When war was eventually declared the YM office emptied.

Griffiths was sent minesweeping on a former herring drifter; Clarkson to patrol duties on an armed yacht. Almost the only regular member of staff left was the office manager, 32-year-old Kathleen Palmer. YM's proprietor, George Henry Pinckard stepped out of his usual anonymity to announce: 'We carry on'. He referred to the magazine's morale-boosting role in the previous conflict, then handed all responsibility to Palmer. Deciding to work from home she moved the magazine out of London to New Barnet.

From May 1940 until November 1945 the final section of each issue became the RNVR Journal. The approach was that of a newsletter, full of anecdotes and updates about people known to each other and also to the magazine readers. The number of pages varied, poignantly, according to the length of each month's Roll of Honour; these were the names of



A painting by regular YM illustrator FB Harnack



British marine artist and RNVR member, David Cobb



Amazingly, details about the ships made it past the censors



Kathleen Palmer, seen sailing the YM 16ft Sharpie, edited the magazine throughout the war



Perhaps in an attempt to counterbalance the emotional effect of this scale of loss, the RNVR Journal listed decorations conferred and also notices of RNVR engagements, weddings and births. In January 1945 it included this announcement:

'Y.M. Editor Marries.

The wedding took place quietly in Portsmouth, on Dec 16, of Lieut-Commander Maurice Griffiths G.M.,

R.N.V.R. and Third Officer Marjorie Copson W.R.N.S., younger daughter of Mr and Mrs H.E. Copson of Northampton.'

Lieut-Commander Griffiths edited the *Yachting Monthly* from 1927 to

1939, when, as a member of the R.N.V.S.R., he left for service with the Navy, but he hopes that the time is not too far distant when he will be back in the editorial chair.'

By November 1945 Griffiths' hopes had been realised. The war was over, the magazine had returned to London, The RNVR Journal had been discontinued and the proprietor (I think) made one final announcement: 'With a farewell salute to all our good friends of the R.N.V.R. for their

magnificent work for His Majesty's Navy, we turn over the whole of our pages once more to matters of yacht cruising, racing, power boating and the love of the sea.'

all RNVR personnel killed/missing/missing, believed killed. The ships – whether cruisers, destroyers, submarines, trawlers, drifters, motor launches, yachts – which had been lost were also listed if members of the RNVR had been among the crew.