

HMS AMETHYST

ANNIVERSARY OF THE YANGTZE INCIDENT



The grave of a notable Royal Naval officer lies in Tandridge. In 1949, Lieutenant Commander John Kerans took command of HMS AMETHYST during what became known as the Yangtze Incident. Today, Commander Kerans rests in peace at St Peter's Church in the village of Tandridge. He was a long-standing resident of Oxted and a member of the Oxted Branch of the Royal British Legion; there is a memorial to him in the RBL Club on Church Lane.



Although a relatively minor event in world terms, literally on the other side of the world, it gripped the nation at a time when World War Two had not long ended. Now, every year a short ceremony of remembrance happens at his graveside. This year there were again three generations of Commander Kerans' family present: daughters Charmian and Melanie; grand-daughter Leonie; and great-grand-daughters Eliza and Stephanie.

Also present were the Chair of Tandridge District Council, Councillor Mike Crane and the Mayor of Reigate, Councillor Rich Michalowski. The military contingent was made up of; the Reigate Branch of the Royal Naval Association and the Oxted Branch of the Royal British Legion.

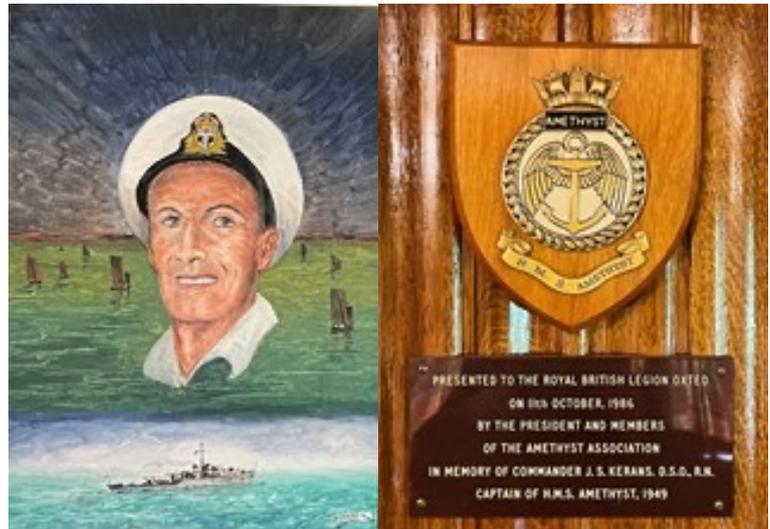
This year, Gillian O'Reilly presented the Chair of the Reigate RNA, Shipmate Ian Page, with a commemorative painting and a model of the ship. Gillian was the daughter of Lieutenant Commander Stuart Hett who served in AMETHYST during the action, incarceration and escape; and was the President of the HMS AMETHYST Association.

Here is the painting being presented along with the three generations of Commander Kerans' family.





There is a memorial to Commander Kerans in the Oxted RBL Club.



Background:

In 1949, during the Chinese civil war, Britain stationed a guard ship at Nanking to protect British lives and property. Halfway up the Yangtze River to replace HMS CONSORT, with opposing armies on each riverbank, HMS AMETHYST came under heavy attack. Badly damaged and driven aground, 21 of her Ship's Company were killed and 28 wounded. CONSORT, plus HM Ships LONDON and BLACK SWAN, sailed to assist but they too came under attack and many more were killed and wounded. After three months of failed negotiations, on 30th July, AMETHYST made a dramatic escape downriver. Lieutenant Commander Kerans was awarded the Distinguished Service Order, one of 16 honours and awards across all those involved in the incident. Simon, AMETHYST's Ship's Cat, was awarded the Dicken Medal, sometimes referred to as the 'Animals' Victoria Cross' –the only cat to hold this honour.