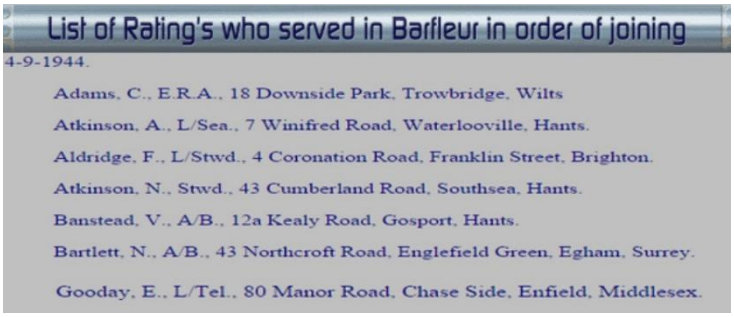
Barfleur, the historic French fishing village on a very familiar part of the Normandy Coast, was the launching point for the Norman Invasion of England in 1066. After a battle there between an Anglo-Dutch Fleet and the French in 1692, it gave it's name to a series of British warships from 1697 onwards, many of which saw action in the battles against France, including the Battle of Toulon and the Napoleonic Wars.





List of Rating's who served in Barfleur in order of joining

4-9-1944.

Adams, C., E.R.A., 18 Downside Park, Trowbridge, Wilts

Atkinson, A., L/Sea., 7 Winifred Road, Waterlooville, Hants.

Aldridge, F., L/Stwd., 4 Coronation Road, Franklin Street, Brighton.

Atkinson, N., Stwd., 43 Cumberland Road, Southsea, Hants.

Banstead, V., A/B., 12a Kealy Road, Gosport, Hants.

Bartlett, N., A/B., 43 Northcroft Road, Englefield Green, Egham, Surrey.

Gooday, E., L/Tel., 80 Manor Road, Chase Side, Enfield, Middlesex.

On 4th September 1944 another Norman, Able Seaman Norman "Norrie" Bartlett joined the latest ship of the line, H.M.S. Barfleur, Britain's largest and most powerful World War II Destroyer.

Norrie joined the Royal Navy at the age of 16 (lying about his age) in 1942. He had been inspired to join the Navy when, on a holiday visit to the Isle of Wight, the ferry passed through the huge armada of the Spithead Review, including H.M.S. King George V (and the German Graf Spee!) five years earlier. Initially trained as a Fleet Air Arm mechanic, he transferred to Gunnery, training at Whale Island Portsmouth. Spells on H.M.S. Bulldog and H.M.S. Duncan on the Atlantic and then (freezing) Arctic Convoys, escorting Merchant Navy ships, led to decoy shelling of Calais to confuse the Nazis about the planned landing sites as a prelude to the D-Day bombardments of Normandy in June 1944. He was finally able to go ashore in Normandy 75 years later thanks to the Taxi Charity for Military Veterans, and this time in more comfortable conditions on the Brittany Ferries vessel! (Although he had sneaked some golfing trips to France some years earlier.)



Norrie 1944 aged 18

Barfleur spent her first few months in sea trials, but gave the crew a Christmas break, which Norrie used to good effect to marry Betty, with Ted Gooday as his best man. However, it was quickly back to sea, based in Gibraltar for more gunnery trials under Commander Michael Townsend D.S.O., O.B.E., D.S.C whose brother, Peter, became well known for his attachment to the Queen's sister, Princess Margaret. Sea trials completed, by VE Day 1945 she was in Malta on route to Suez and the Pacific as part of the H.M.S. Duke of York Battle Group. By June she had reached Sydney and was designated Flagship, Rear Admiral, (Destroyers), J.H. Edelsten moving on to Manus in July as part of the King George V Battleship Group under Vice Admiral Rawlings (1 Battleship, 4 Fleet Carriers, 6 Cruisers, and 22 Destroyers). Barfleur was designated "picket ship" for Fleet Carrier H.M.S. Indefatigable with a role to intercept Kamikaze fighters. A 2023 reunion in Normandy with a crew member of the carrier led to a "discussion" about the single Kamikaze which did get through the defences. The Group, then under the British Pacific Fleet, joined the Third Fleet (Admiral Halsey USN) which became the largest armada ever seen (23 battleships, 26 aircraft carriers, 64 escort carriers, 52 cruisers, 323 destroyers …∑967 warships and around 1500 auxiliaries)



Barfleur in Malta

By July they were routinely shelling the Japanese military positions on shore and Barfleur had been engaged in the bombardment of Tokyo Docks using her 4.5-inch guns when, in Norrie's words, "the order to fire was given and the gun layer pulled the trigger. That was followed by an almighty explosion and the turret filled with cordite smoke. Needless to say, we vacated it faster than a flash of lightning to be greeted by the sight of a gaping hole in the foc'sle above our very own mess deck. Fortunately, no one was in the mess. We later

discovered 3 more shells with faulty fuses which could have been disastrous". Norrie concluded with "we all lost our hearing and mine never got better than 80% loss in both ears"

Early next month, the crew witnessed an overflight by the B29 Enola Gay, and were told to face away from Japan as the atomic bomb was detonated. After the second bomb on Nagasaki, the Japanese surrender quickly followed, but the official ceremony was delayed two weeks by a typhoon system which caused serious damage to some ships and the fleet was prevented from entering Tokyo Bay until early September. General Yoshijiro Umezu signed the surrender in the presence of General Douglas MacArthur on board the USS Missouri with Barfleur as one of the escort ships for H.M.S. King George V which he'd first seen in that 1937 fleet review.



Barfleur in Adelaide

On the 7th of September "Barfleur" sailed, under the orders of the U.S. Destroyer USS Clarence K. Bronson, for Ominato in the Matsu Kaiwan at the northern tip of Honshu, arriving without incident on the 9th. "Barfleur" was the first British vessel to enter Ominato since the Japanese capitulation. Reports had been received that a large number of British and American prisoners of war were in the ten camps in Hakodate, Hokkaido. PoWs were brought by train to the dockside. Norrie told, movingly, how these men, dressed in rags, emaciated and ill, still lined up on the dockside as proudly as though they were on parade in front of the King. Some kissed the deck of Barfleur to say that they were home. Barfleur and Bronson transported the PoWs to Tokyo Bay for repatriation but those images were imprinted on Norrie's mind. He felt deeply honoured in 2020 to deliver the POWs prayer at the Covid VJ Day commemoration at National Arboretum to follow a speech by Prince Charles, Prince of Wales (also known as Dad's "warm up man"). Norrie also had a brief conversation with a French Admiral about H.M.S. Barfleur's origins! Four months later Norrie represented the Royal Navy, joining six other veterans at the Royal British Legion Festival of Remembrance. They became friends through the support of the Taxi Charity and he joined their visits to Normandy, Arnhem and Oosterbeek as well as the annual Christmas outing, also enjoying visits to Biggin Hill and Chatham Dockyard, where he was delighted to be able to go aboard H.M.S. Cavalier as well as seeing the model of H.M.S. Victory.



VJ Day



RBL Festival of Remembrance (Dick Godwin, Taxi Charity)



Taxi in Normandy 2023

Demobbed from H.M.S. Victory in 1946, Norrie's association with the Navy continued as he was involved in making the boilers for Britain's Nuclear Submarine Fleet. He hosted a reunion for H.M.S. Kipling survivors in the presence of Lady Mountbatten and whose Captain was the brother of the Barfleur's First Lieutenant. In 1997 he hitchhiked a lift from Gibraltar on H.M.S. Invincible to Pompey as part of the RN families programme with grandson Petty Officer Nick. He wandered around the aircraft carrier, found the bridge and spent a happy afternoon



Norrie, Harrier, HMS Invincible 1997

swapping “dits” (naval slang for stories) with Capt Roy Clare RN! He became no stranger to the bridge of a ship.

D-Day 80 was to be Norrie’s last major commemoration, but, thanks to work by the Taxi Charity’s brilliant Chairman, Colin Mills, he was appointed Chevalier of the order of the Legion d’Honneur to go with his Three Oceans Stars. Colin supported him too on a D-Day tv interview with Dawn Neesom on GB News, and he also featured on D-Day broadcasts on BBC South, Meridian TV, and the Veterans’ Foundation. This last visit to Normandy was so very memorable and gave him strength to fight the illnesses which then took him. Before embarking for Caen, the Taxi Charity had arranged a visit to Montgomery’s D-Day operations HQ at Southwick. His great friend and choir mate, Richard Collie, grabbed the attention at a rather senior Sea Lord to say there was an RN veteran there. Dad’s demob posting was to H.M.S. Victory and when this officer asked if there was anything he would like, he said he’d really like to visit her again.



Portsmouth Dockyard 2024

Commodore Voyce, commanding the Portsmouth RN presence stepped in and at 10am prompt the following morning Victory’s Commanding Officer Lt Commander Smith R.N. and the Base Commanding Officer, Captain McLocklan R.N., welcomed him and gave him the huge honour of having him piped aboard. He said after this, he could die happy.



'Piping the Side' HMS Victory



Standing with Giants 2024

After a smooth Brittany Ferry trip and the D-Day 80 ceremonies in Normandy there followed a quiet day at the British Normandy Memorial since all the crowds and royalty had disappeared. He recognised the name of a crew mate he had served with honoured on the memorial wall which brought tears to his eyes and he was again moved by the RN silhouette amongst the Standing With Giants installation.



On the Bridge

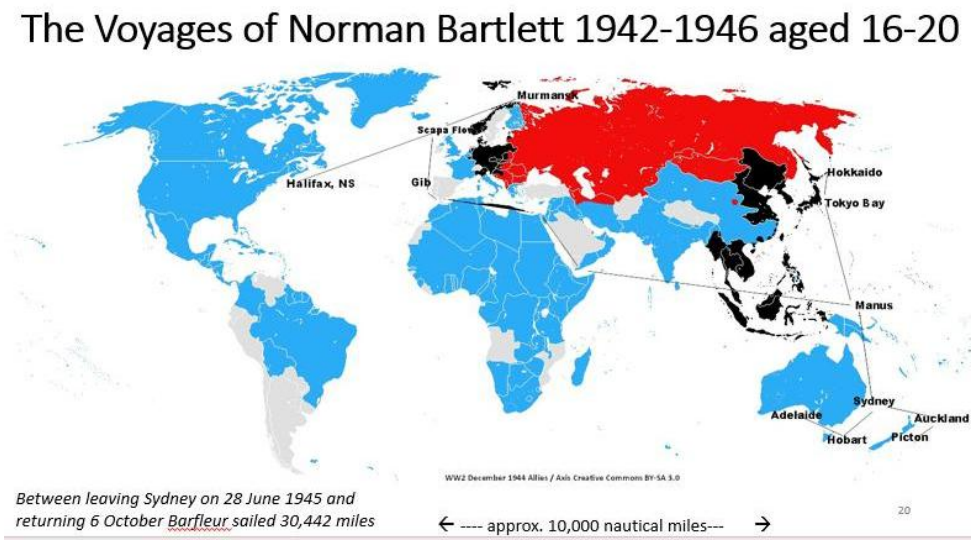
But there was more to come. The Captain of the Brittany Ferries vessel on the return to Portsmouth had also captained MV Barfleur, one of their ships which had carried the Taxis and their Veterans to Caen on many occasions. On learning of Norrie’s association with another Barfleur he very kindly invited him on to the bridge – he even got to sound the ship’s hooter, causing momentary panic among the crew! This kindness was typical of the way Brittany Ferries had looked after the Taxi Charity and their valuable cargo on every trip. It was sad, therefore, as it was for the warship bearing the same name in 1966, that MV Barfleur undertook her final journey out of Poole to Cherbourg on 12 October 80 years later.



Brittany Ferry Caen-Portsmouth D-DAY80



Brittany ferries MV Barfleur October 2026 final departure from Poole



Norrie died a week before his 99th birthday and was buried with military honours escorted by the Royal British Legion and the Taxi Charity for Military Veterans who brought so much happiness, friendship and joy to his later years. He was serenaded as the "father" of Hart Male Voice Choir who he'd loved singing with for 37 years, and said goodbye to at his second and spiritual home, North Hants Golf Club, who staged a competition in his honour in recognition of what would have been his 100th Birthday this year. He, and his beloved wife Betty, rest in peace overlooking the third fairway lake, right by the fourth tee.



Norman Bartlett RN



Picture and narrative credits for H.M.S. Barfleur https://www.H.M.S.barfleur.co.uk/ (Ray Mullaney)
Taxi Charity event pictures and HMVC choir support from Richard Collie, Peter Attwater, and Andy McClaren
Pic of the town of Barfleur by Jean DeWaele (Google Maps)
Picture of MV Barfleur from BBC news