

Lieutenant Commander John Chrisp



Lieutenant Commander John Chrisp who was “Number 2” on the Training Ship Foudroyant in the late 1950's and early 1960's

John Chrisp entered the Royal Navy as a boy seaman in the 1930's. When war broke out he was given his first command, the armed trawler “Jasper” operating in the North Sea. In 1941 he was sent to oversee boom defence work in Crete which was the start of a phase in his life during which he would experience the severest of challenges.

His posting to Crete was just before the collapse of the island's defences in the face of the overwhelming strength of the German invasion forces. As Allied forces withdrew from their positions John Chrisp spent several weeks in the mountains aided and fed by Cretan shepherds until captured in June and sent to a prison camp in Germany.

He soon established himself as a trouble maker, and after two unsuccessful escape attempts from different camps he was transferred in September 1942 to Colditz Castle.



*John Chrisp
on TS Foudroyant*

His skill with ropes made him a key contributor to the “Franz Joseph” German NCO impersonation escape attempt in September 1943. He made the 30 foot length of rope from bed sheets with which 20 prisoners were to escape down the castle wall, after the false NCO had relieved two sentries with prisoners dressed as guards. The attempt failed since the officer impersonating the German NCO did not have the right password when challenged.

John Chrisp's small size led him to join Major Dick Lorraine and Flight Lieutenant Dominic Bruce, both also small in stature, in an escape attempt through the castle's sewage system. The final leg of the tortuous approach to the outfall required a rope ladder from which to bridge the sump towards the end. The sound of the spike being cautiously hammered in alerted one of the sentries, and the escapees were discovered when the sewage manholes were lifted. After the relief of Colditz by the American Army in April 1945 John was repatriated to England and awarded the MBE for his escape attempts.

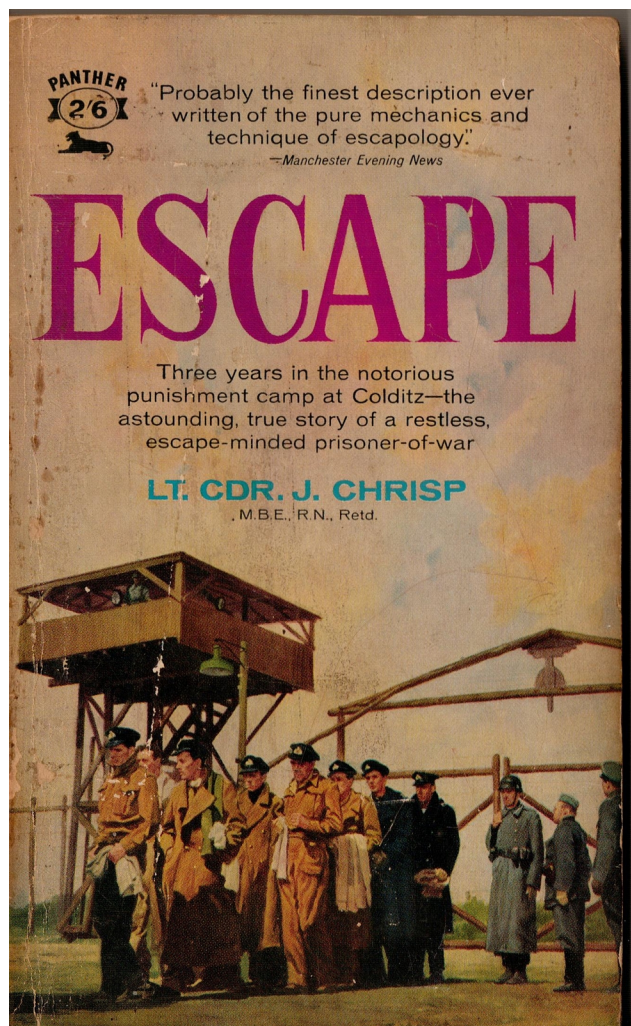
On retirement from the Navy he spent three years in the Antarctic as a whaling inspector, using his spare time to write two books, “The Tunnellers of Sandborstal” and “South of Cape Horn”. He later retired to Portsmouth where he joined the staff of TS Foudroyant as No. 2 to the Captain Superintendent.

John Chrisp was a quiet modest man, and most people who came into contact with him would never have guessed of the key part he had played in German prisoner of war camps, nor indeed of his service with the whaling fleets in the Antarctic. Anyone who reads his two books would be impressed by his fluent writing skills complemented by an ability to convince the reader that they were there sharing his exploits. A close friend of mine who started a life at sea sailing out of Hartlepool on whalers, told me John Chrisp's vivid and accurate descriptions of Antarctic whaling are so close to his own experiences.

Although it is more than 50 years since his books were published they are still being sought after on Amazon and other websites. "The Tunnellers of Sandborstal" and its paperback version, "Escape", sell for between £5 and £50, and "South of Cape Horn" can fetch in excess of £100.

John Chrisp was born on 14th May 1908. He died on 27th November 2006 aged 98 years.

Peter Noble



**QD19: Originally appeared In the "Quarterdeck" magazine
Ref: 2012 Issue 2 (Summer) pages 10 to 11**