Lt Cdr Ian Griffiths,
DSC and Bar,
his Career
and his Cats

(2005)

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Ian Griffits joined the Merchant Navy straight from school at the age of 17, and became an officer on ships of the B.I. Line. In 1939 he transferred to the Royal Navy, and having successfully completed his training served on, and later captained, several gunboats in British coastal waters and in the English Channel. It wasn't long before he was involved in a successful action against a German E-boat in the Channel; and then because of that and his participation in further actions at Zeebrugge, Cherbourg, Dieppe and Dunkerque he was mentioned in dispatches no fewer than three times.

These MIDs were followed by the award of a DSC to Griffiths in 1942 for a 'highly successful action' against a superior enemy force, while he was in command of one of two LCCs. Five out of six enemy minesweepers were either sunk or badly damaged on that occasion. In about 1943 Lt Griffiths had moved on to destroyers, the first being HMS *Dauntless*, on which it's believed he was first lieutenant; this was followed in 1944 by HMS *Brissenden*. She took part in the Battle of the Scillies, when German E-boats ventured close to the Scilly Islands, were engaged and some sunk. Later in 1944 he commanded the frigate HMS *Riou*; then (probably after the war) HMS *Easton*, HMS *Opportune* and finally HMS *Amethyst*.

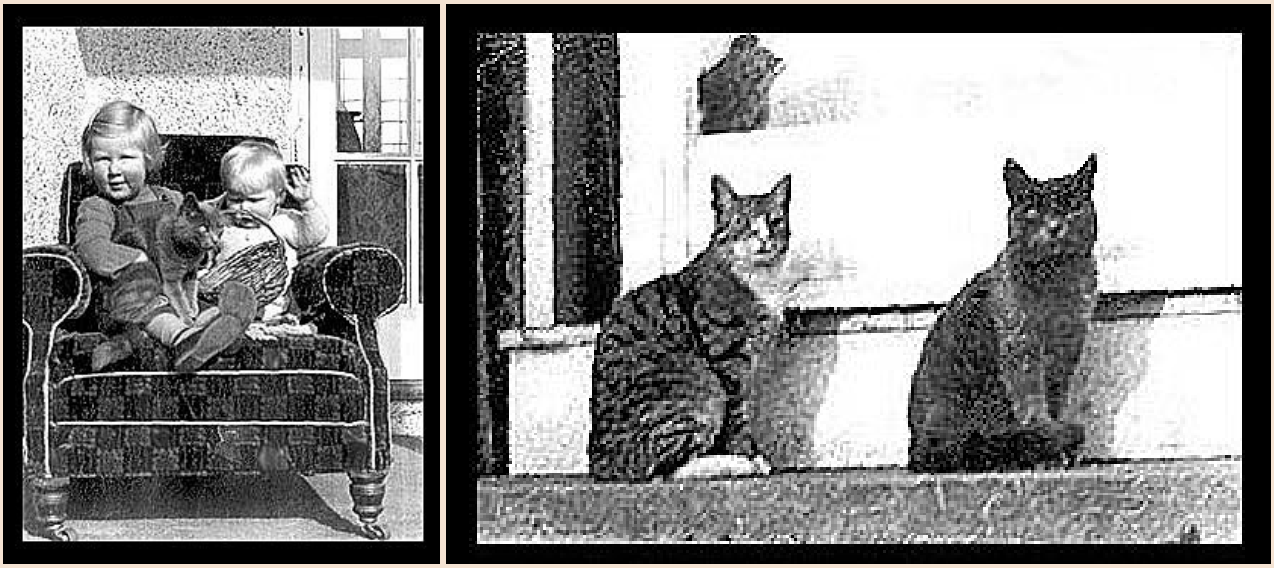
Griffiths on bridge of gunboat

HMS Riou

While he was in command of *Riou* in March 1945, she was engaged in an action off the Dutch coast to drive off more E-boats; for this further successful skirmish Griffiths gained a bar to his DSC. Later in the year *Riou* became

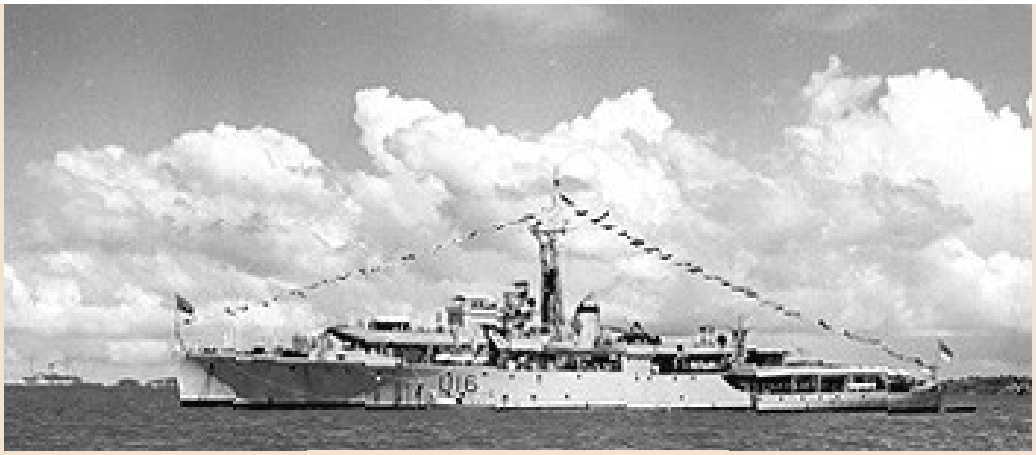
the first British ship to sail all the way up the river Elbe to the devastated city of Hamburg, in the company of HMS *Franklin*. While the ship was there, Field-Marshal Montgomery ('Monty') was welcomed on board.

Ian Griffiths seems to have enjoyed the company of cats. When he married and had a family — two daughters and a son — there are photos of the children with family pets; and a photo exists (not shown here) of a cat called **Monty** — perhaps after Montgomery; he was ship's cat on one of the vessels Griffiths served on.



Griffiths family cats

There's also a nice photograph of Griffiths on board ship with a grey cat on his shoulder — this was **Peter Puss**, who was a she! The photo appears at the head of this article by the title, and there's also a caricature sketch (*below*) of the same subject. Ian Griffiths' uniform shows he was a lieutenant at the time, and so it's thought he was first lieutenant of HMS *Brissenden* when the photo was taken and the sketch made — in 1943 or 1944. (An inscription on the sketch reads, 'No hammocks are to be slung. Hands stand by to close up on the alarm bells!!!') Peter Puss was not one of the family cats, and it's not known where she came from or what became of her. It's said that in the middle of an enemy engagement Peter Puss gave birth to kittens, and despite the circumstances a message was sent to the bridge to say that mother and kittens were doing well!



HMS Amethyst *dressed overall*

It wasn't long after this that Ian Griffiths gained his promotion to Lieutenant Commander and took his first command, HMS *Riou*, in 1944. By 1947 he was captain of *Amethyst*, operating in Malaya in the conflict against the Communists.

The ship's base was Hong Kong, and it was on a visit there for supplies in March 1948 that Simon was found on Stonecutters Island and brought on board (read Simon's story in full here). The captain and Simon got on well together, and it seems that some photographs were taken by Griffiths — not nearly such an easy matter in those days as it is now — of the cat when he first joined the ship. Ian Griffiths' elder daughter Anna very kindly lent us these unique photos: we present them below and are most grateful to Anna for enabling us to show them.

When Griffiths was posted away from *Amethyst* later in 1948, he felt it would not be right to take Simon with him and disturb the cat's life, so Simon remained on the ship; but he didn't treat the new captain, Bernard Skinner, with quite the affection and loyalty he had shown to his 'first captain', Ian Griffiths.

Tragically, Lt Cdr Griffiths contracted poliomyelitis and died in January 1949, still only in his early 30s, of what would these days be a treatable disease. A distinguished naval career, which surely would have gone on to reach greater heights, was thus cut short in its prime.

It was a little later, in April 1949, that *Amethyst* was involved in what became known as the Yangtze Incident. The crew were hailed as heroes, and the role played by the young cat Simon, whose first captain had been Lt Cdr Ian Griffiths, secured his fame also . . . but that's another story.

Pictures of a young Simon aboard *Amethyst* in 1948, from the Griffiths' album

Very warm thanks go to Anna Grant, her sister Jane Moss, and their brother Peter Griffiths for researching and providing us with the information and photographs used in this account.

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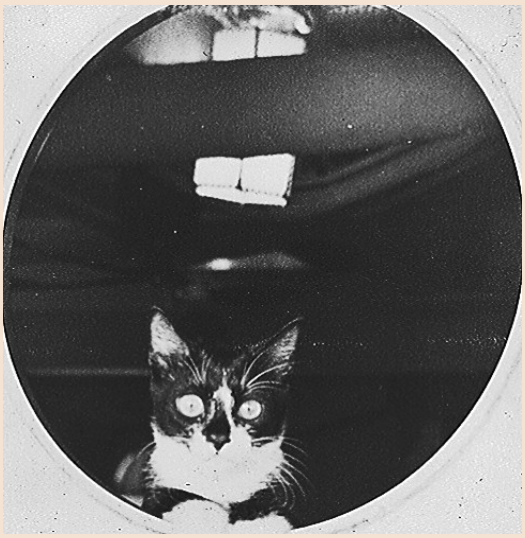

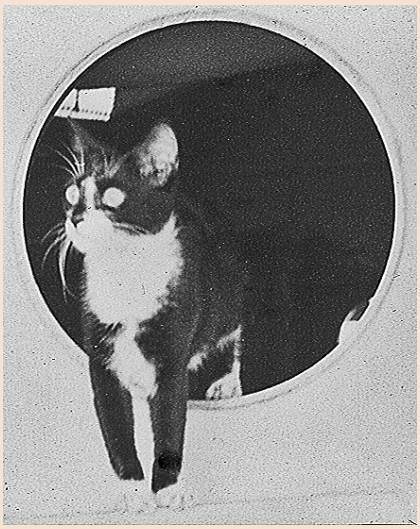

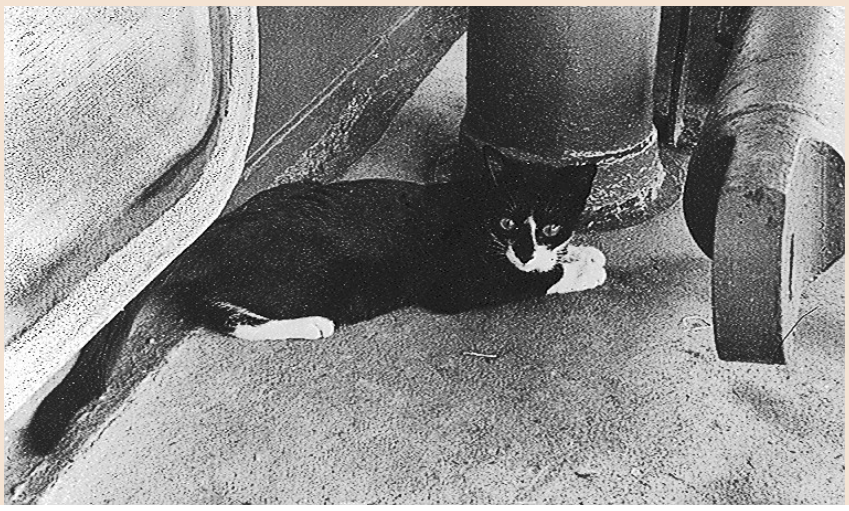

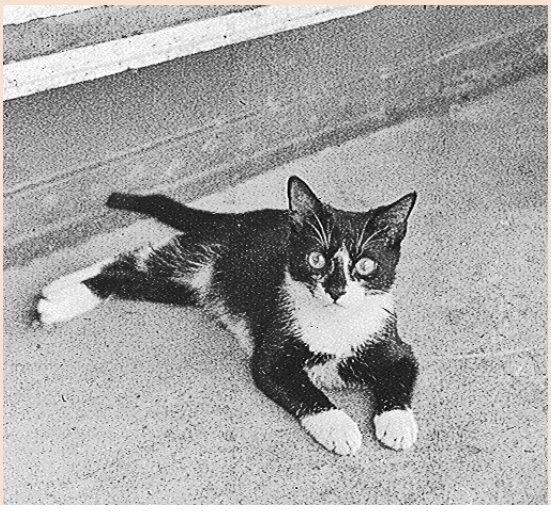

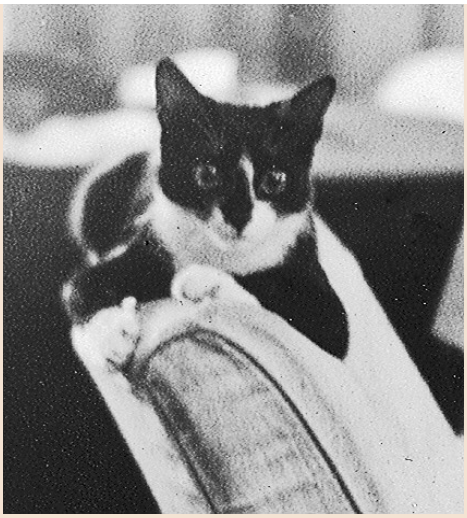

There’s a summary of Ian Griffiths’ wartime record here.

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