

Poseidon

China's Secret Salvage of Britain's Lost Submarine

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Contents

List of Illustrations	ix
Acknowledgments	xiii
Note on Measurements and Romanization	xvii
<i>Poseidon</i> : “The Sea King” (poem)	xix
Introduction	1
Chapter 1 Hallowed Be Thy Name	3
Chapter 2 The Men and the Boat	7
Chapter 3 “This Most Absolutely Forgotten of Imperial Outposts”	27
Chapter 4 Bad Judgment in Good Visibility	37
Chapter 5 Escape	45
Chapter 6 Hews and Ho	57
Chapter 7 “A Damned Lie”	63
Chapter 8 The Court of Enquiry and Court-Martial	69
Chapter 9 Aftermath and Legacy	83
Chapter 10 A Search Begins	105
Chapter 11 London and Portsmouth	111
Chapter 12 More Than Just the World Cup	121
Chapter 13 London Again	125
Chapter 14 The Rosetta Stone	137

Chapter 15	The Salvage	143
Chapter 16	Finding the Graves	155
Chapter 17	On Eternal Patrol	169
Appendix:	HMS <i>Poseidon</i> Officers and Crew	189
Notes		193
References		209
Index		215

Illustrations

1. HMS *Poseidon* at anchor in Portsmouth, December 1930, just before departure for duty in Asia. (Author collection)
2. HMS *Poseidon* underway off the English coast. (Author collection)
3. Four *Parthian*-class submarines in port. *Poseidon* is second from right. (Author collection)
4. *Poseidon*'s forward torpedo room, from which six men made a miraculous escape. (Royal Navy Submarine Museum)
5. A postcard depiction of Liu Gong Island, ca. 1920. (Author collection)
6. A contemporary view of Liu Gong Island's west side. (Author Collection)
7. Petty Officer and Chief Telegraphist Walter Jeffery, whose diary illuminated the life—and death—of HMS *Poseidon*. (Doreen Ridsdale)
8. Leading Seaman Frank Dowling and his wife, Vera. They were married less than a month before *Poseidon* sailed to China. (Linda Matthews)
9. Stoker Frederick T. Pointer, one of the eighteen men who died in *Poseidon*'s aft section. (Norman Tillier)
10. Able Seaman Frederick K. C. Tolliday, an ardent Arsenal supporter from Finsbury Park in North London, who perished aboard *Poseidon*. (Susan Kenny)
11. Stoker Albert R. Winter and his wife, before *Poseidon*'s departure. Winter escaped the sinking *Poseidon* but died from poisoning, having swallowed too much oil from the ruptured fuel tank while floating on the surface. He is one of two *Poseidon* submariners buried on Liu Gong Island. (Royal Navy Submarine Museum)

12. The 1,750-ton cargo steamer SS *Yuta*, after it had collided with and sunk HMS *Poseidon*. (Author Collection)
13. HMS *Marazion*, a former minesweeper being used as a target ship when HMS *Poseidon* collided with SS *Yuta*. (Author Collection)
14. Submarine HMS *Perseus* stands by at the scene of *Poseidon*'s sinking, as other Royal Navy vessels arrive. Bubbles from the downed *Poseidon* can be seen in the center of the frame, just to the left of and behind the lifeboat. (Royal Navy Submarine Museum)
15. Survivors from HMS *Poseidon* are brought aboard HMS *Marazion*. The survivors, gathered on the left side of the photograph, are covered with oil that had been floating on the surface after the submarine sank. (Royal Navy Submarine Museum)
16. Leading Seaman Reginald Clarke is brought aboard HMS *Hermes* for medical treatment. Clarke, who was seriously affected by decompression sickness (the bends), appears to be wincing in pain. (Author Collection)
17. Petty Officer Patrick Willis walks across the deck of aircraft carrier HMS *Hermes* under his own power, shortly after ascending from HMS *Poseidon*'s forward torpedo room, after three hours on the bottom. (Author Collection)
18. A specimen of the Davis Submerged Escape Apparatus (DSEA), on display at the Royal Navy Submarine Museum in Gosport. The DSEA was used by six *Poseidon* crew and one Chinese mate's assistant to escape from the sunken submarine. Four of the navy men and the assistant survived. (Author Collection)
19. HMS *Poseidon*'s officers attend the funeral of Able Seaman Arthur J. Lovock and Stoker Albert R. Winter, whose bodies were recovered after the sinking of *Poseidon*. Lieutenant Commander Bernard Galpin, *Poseidon*'s commanding officer, is on the left, closest to the camera. (Royal Navy Submarine Museum)
20. A photo of the graves of Able Seaman Arthur J. Lovock and Stoker Albert R. Winter, which also bore the names of the eighteen others lost aboard *Poseidon*. This photograph allowed the graves to be relocated after seventy years. (Royal Navy Submarine Museum)
21. Lieutenant Commander Bernard Galpin (center, head turned towards camera) leads the final farewell at the site of HMS

- Poseidon's* sinking, at a wreath-laying ceremony. The buoy marks the site of the accident. (Royal Navy Submarine Museum)
22. Lieutenant Commander Bernard Galpin's first representation of the accident, drawn shortly after the collision and sinking. (Author photograph, National Archives document)
 23. A schematic drawing estimating the courses and speeds of HMS *Poseidon* and SS *Yuta*, prepared and submitted for Lieutenant Commander Bernard Galpin's court-martial. (Author photograph, National Archives document)
 24. A drawing of the collision prepared by the court-martial prosecution. Using the courses and speeds provided by both Galpin and *Yuta's* *Iyeshi* after the accident, the author's own plotting of the collision matched this drawing almost exactly. (Author photograph, National Archives document)
 25. A piece of brass rail from HMS *Poseidon's* casing. It was cut from the submarine by Royal Navy divers after the navy's plans to salvage *Poseidon* were abandoned. The piece was presented to Helen Galpin, Bernard Galpin's wife. It was later donated to the Royal Navy Submarine Museum by their son. It is one of the only known remnants of *Poseidon*. (Author photograph, Royal Navy Submarine Museum archives)
 26. The *Poseidon* survivors arrive in the United Kingdom aboard SS *Rawalpindi*. Patrick Willis is second from right on the lower deck. Ironically, Leading Signalman William Cook later died aboard *Rawalpindi* in 1939, when the ship, pressed into Royal Navy service, was sunk by two German warships. (Author Collection)
 27. Petty Officer Patrick Willis is congratulated upon his return to Portsmouth by Admiral Sir Arthur Waistell, Commander in Chief, Portsmouth. (Royal Navy Submarine Museum)
 28. Petty Officer Patrick Willis poses with his wife, Mary (holding flowers), upon his return to Portsmouth. (Author collection)
 29. Actor Sydney Seaward portrays Patrick Willis in the 1931 feature film *Men Like These*. Seaward wears an authentic Davis Submerged Escape Apparatus on his chest, provided by the makers of the device, Siebe, Gorman and Co. (Author collection)
 30. The conning tower of HMS *Perseus* exhibits the *Parthian*-class submarines' distinctive configuration. *Perseus*, sunk in the Ionian Sea in 1941, is the only known extant *Parthian*-class submarine. (Marcel-Kurt Moser)

31. A fragment from a colonial headstone found in a wall on Liu Gong Island. (Author photograph)
32. The headstone of Stoker George Jackson of HMS *Janus*. Several intact headstones from the former colonial cemetery on Liu Gong Island were found. The markers from the *Poseidon* graves were not among them. (Author photograph)
33. A memorial postcard for those lost aboard HMS *Poseidon*, sold to raise money for their families. "To the imperishable memory, and to the glory of God, in remembrance of the crew of HMS *Poseidon*. Which sank in collision off Wei-Hai-Wei June 9th 1931. Gone but not forgotten. Heroes all of them." (Author collection)

Introduction

It is a strange experience to search for one thing and find something else entirely. That is especially true when what is discovered far exceeds the value of the original objective. Rarely is the miner so fortunate to begin digging for coal, only to strike gold.

In that way, it seems my luck is far better than most. While searching for shipwrecks that would serve as candidates for an exploration project in China's coastal waters, I unknowingly stumbled into a dusty corner of British and Chinese maritime history. Thankfully for those of us who seek history not so much in books or Google searches but in the forgotten attics of the world's governments and militaries, the house of Time is vast and particularly unkempt.

Yet it was an online search that provided my initial encounter with HMS *Poseidon*. Despite my spending over a decade living in northern China, it was research on shipwrecks from a late nineteenth-century conflict that first led me to the story of a British submarine that had met an untimely end off coastal Shandong Province.

At first, the loss of HMS *Poseidon* seemed like nothing more than a tragic occurrence during the Interwar Period, of which there were several. Despite "good visibility," *Poseidon* and a coastal freighter collided on a summer day, and within minutes, the submarine and a number of its crew were gone. The details of this simple accident, however, would haunt me as I examined *Poseidon's* fate.

The circumstances surrounding the sinking seemed to deny those who perished the glory that would otherwise be bestowed upon submariners who would be lost during the coming conflict. Being killed in a peacetime accident bears with it a kind of ignominy, almost as if the victims brought it on themselves.

Poseidon's loss made headlines around China and other parts of the world. An outpouring of grief and expressions of sympathy came

from many corners, and funds were raised in London and Hong Kong for the families of the lost. But before long, *Poseidon* was simply forgotten, pushed off the front page by other submarine accidents and world events, including the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in September 1931, just three months later. The tales of decorated members of its crew would ultimately be replaced by the many heroic acts that would occur during World War II.

A diver and explorer, I ran across *Poseidon*'s name and soon began planning to find, reach, and descend to the remains of the submarine. It would not be easy finding and then diving a target at the bottom of China's muddy Bohai Sea. One could not predict what the conditions would be like, or what the reaction of Chinese coastal officials or China's navy would be. While I searched for more information, I started to worry more about getting entangled in official red tape than in the fishing lines that might shroud the wreck.

This is a story about searches: underwater, on islands, in cemeteries, and national forests, and perhaps most importantly, online and in libraries and archives. Some underwater searches last for years, requiring thousands of dives, each morning beginning with the hope that, as the treasure hunter Mel Fisher once said, "Today's the day!" The search for HMS *Poseidon* had its own eureka moments but not in a traditional shipwreck manner.

Except in its earliest stages, the search for *Poseidon* never progressed the way I expected. Then again, that is the whole point of exploration. Just as the underdog wins the average sporting match forty percent of the time, a search through history, and especially for a forgotten shipwreck in foreign waters, rarely turns out as planned.

At every juncture, the search turned in unforeseen ways. Each new account of the sinking seemed to have discrepancies, each new trip to the field or visit to a records repository led to new questions, some of which kept me awake for days at a time. The personalities involved, the strategic situation of the time, and the oddness of a submarine sinking in that part of the world make *Poseidon*'s loss far more than a simple, sad tragedy.

Paul Gallico's 1969 novel, *The Poseidon Adventure*, told the story of an imaginary cruise ship capsized by a rogue wave. The true tale of heroism and intrigue that surrounds the sinking of the real submarine HMS *Poseidon* surpasses any fictional tale and resonates into the present.

Chapter 1

Hallowed Be Thy Name

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
on earth, as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil:
For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory
forever and ever. Amen.

The Irishman's prayer ended after "evil"; Catholics did not say that last bit. He opened his eyes, raised his head, and unclasped his hands, looking around the compartment in the dim glimmer of the flashlight, hoping that his vision would adjust and allow him to see something of the other men. They stood gathered around the ladder, these men that were about to follow his orders to risk their lives, to possibly save them, and to possibly lose them.

When he joined the Royal Navy on his eighteenth birthday—St. Patrick's Day, 1915—in his native County Cork in Ireland, Petty Officer Patrick Henry Willis left a country where Christians did not pray together, where some were Catholic, as he was, and some were Protestant, as some of these submariners were. As for the two Chinese boys, well, they did not speak much English anyway. In a situation like this, everybody made his own peace with his own god and then got on with the job.

None of them had expected that their routine torpedo exercises off the coast of China would go awry and leave them stranded on the sea floor, in absolute darkness. The cold water poured into the room and

crept first up their pant legs, then their drawers, and now clawed at their torsos and numbed their arms and hands.

Willis was not entirely sure what had happened to their submarine, but the crashing sound and lurch that preceded their uncontrolled dive to the bottom led him to believe they had collided with another vessel. Whose vessel? The target ship? Another submarine? Some other ship? The pondering of each question offered momentary diversion from the cold and monotonous waiting.

Six men and two boys stood trapped inside in the forward torpedo room. The klaxon sounded collision and the order to close watertight doors was given, just before they felt the blow of whatever had struck them. The captain must have seen the other ship and ordered the doors shut to try to save the boat. The men did not know if any of their mates had escaped before HMS *Poseidon* sank, if there were other men still alive on the other side of the watertight door to their compartment, or if they were the only survivors, preparing to risk their temporary safety for a chance at rescue.

Willis happened to be with another native of County Cork, Able Seaman Vincent Nagle, *Poseidon's* only other Irishman. Trapped along with them were Able Seaman Edmund Holt, Leading Seaman Reginald Clarke, Able Seaman Arthur Lovock, and Able Seaman George Hews. Also there were two Chinese mate's assistants, one of whom they called Ah Hai, and the other, Ho Shung.

The submariners in the forward torpedo room were waiting because Willis told them to wait. He told them they needed to flood the compartment and then try to make an escape to the surface via the hatch, and the others agreed.

Without the rising water, despite its relative cold, they would not be able to equalize the pressure between the inside of their compartment and the weight of the water pushing down on the outside of the submarine's hull.

Once the pressure reached a similar level to that outside, they would open the hatch and make their way out, wearing a strange breathing contraption that their training and skipper had led them to believe would provide them with enough breathing gas to make it safely to the surface. A gauge told them how far they were from safety: 126 feet. Not so far, but definitely not a sure thing, Willis thought.

Flooding the compartment was not so swift. After a half-hour, they tried to turn the steel wheel to open the hatch, but it refused to budge. Realizing it would take far longer, Willis told the men to

switch off their oxygen supply and to breathe available air while the water rose throughout the room. The minutes crept by, with little to do but chat, or sing, or just stand in darkness and silence and contemplate if this is how they would die, if their Creator had not shown the other submariners a bit of mercy, taking them quickly after the sinking. Or maybe they were all on the surface, wondering why Willis and his lot had not been swift or smart enough to get out before the boat went down.

Occasionally, Willis switched on a flashlight to check on his men. After two and a half hours, and a second failed try, Lovock and Holt were as much sucked out as climbed out in any orderly escape attempt when the hatch finally yielded.

Willis wondered if Holt and Lovock had made it. How long would it take to reach the surface? Could he hold his breath that long?

When he was not thinking of his men, the brusque, stout submariner's thoughts stretched over six thousand miles away, back to England. There, his wife waited with his daughter, Julia, born less than a month before. Willis would lead his men. He would fulfill his duty to the Royal Navy. But he had to live; he had to make it. If he failed, he would never lay eyes upon his first child, and Julia would grow up without a father.

The liquid cold had almost reached their armpits. Now. Now it's time to go, Willis thought, as the numbness began to get the better of them. We'll pop the hatch and start up. No one had ever attempted what they were doing and lived: use escape gear to surface from a downed submarine. Willis gave the men their sequence, to go out one by one. He was a religious man, so before giving the last order, "masks on," there was just final thing left to do. "Our Father, who art in Heaven . . ."

Chapter 3

“This Most Absolutely Forgotten of Imperial Outposts”

During its time as a British colony, Weihaiwei was far from a jewel in the crown. It did not have the magnificent harbor of Hong Kong. It did not see the diverse cargo of Singapore. It was a backwater before it ever came under British control. Weihaiwei's process of becoming a British colony illustrates the geopolitical forces at work in East Asia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and with them the interests of imperial powers colliding along the China coast.

In the last decade of the nineteenth century, imperial Japan's industrial edge over the rest of Asia, along with its rising regional ambition and increasing need for raw materials to fuel continued growth, combined to create a nation that was willing to use its strength against its neighbors. The first friction between Japan and China came in the mid-1890s, when the arrival of troops from both sides on the Korean Peninsula began to threaten Chinese suzerainty over what the Qing dynasty traditionally considered a vassal state.

Japan's rise also coincided with weakness and internal strife in its two largest neighbors, China and Russia. Both were in the last throes of dynastic monarchy although neither knew it at the time. Both were long accustomed to being generally unchallenged, and that arrogance was undermining their true military strength. Also, both were slow to embrace industrialization. China's Qing dynasty rulers dabbled in modern ideas, mostly aesthetic ones, but rejected new, non-Chinese technology, unlike the way that Japan had embraced modernization following the Meiji Restoration in 1868.

China's Modern Navy

One area in which China had been willing to consider foreign technology and know-how was for its fledgling navy. China had not had

a significant seaborne military force since the Ming dynasty (1368–1644). Many of its difficulties in dealing with foreign powers, and the ability of those nations to wrest land and other concessions from the imperial government, were due to China's almost complete lack of a naval deterrent. Although Macau was ceded to Portugal in the 1550s, it was not until the nineteenth century that European countries and then Japan made their greatest territorial gains in China.

Leading the naval effort was Li Hongzhang, one of the dynasty's top diplomats and generals. He was a better diplomat than he was a general. Li was regarded in China for his willingness to adopt Western industrialization and modernization and to have pushed for those ideas at the Qing court, but when diplomacy failed and military action was required, he was far less skilled. He had made his reputation as a military leader in the suppression of the Taiping Rebellion (1850–64), but against foreign foes, he failed to score a single victory.¹ Given his dual portfolios, Li was a natural choice to head China's new navy. That force was first deployed in 1884 and had four divisions in different Chinese geographic areas. In its inaugural test, the Chinese Fujian Fleet was entirely destroyed by French naval forces.² After yet another military defeat in the Sino-French War of 1886,³ Li began rebuilding the nation's navy.

At the time, the British built the best warships in the world, and the Chinese knew it. British shipbuilders would ultimately arm Japan's fleet in its earliest stages. While Li would have been well aware of the quality of British steel, he also knew its high price. Therefore, he turned to a rising land and naval power whose steel mills and shipyards were also gaining in reputation: the German state of Prussia, whose products were available at a lower price than those of their British rivals.⁴ With a limited budget and seeking a force of forty-eight ships, Li would not be able to buy the top of the line.

Li Hongzhang chose Weihaiwei as the base for his Beiyang Fleet. Although China had faced foreign incursions up and down its extensive coastline, Li correctly predicted that the next major conflict would center on Korea. Therefore, Weihaiwei, close to the entrance of the Gulf of Pechihli and having ready access to the East China Sea, was a good choice. The Gulf of Pechihli offers maritime access from northern Chinese ports to larger waters beyond. It abuts China's northernmost coastal areas and allows for a number of major port cities of such as Weihaiwei and Chefoo (now Yantai) in Shandong, Tianjin, and Liaoning's Port Arthur. Northern China's most important

waterway, the Yellow River, empties into it. The gulf becomes part of the Yellow Sea to the south and east, where it meets the Korean Peninsula, the Yellow Sea becoming part of the East China Sea before finally joining the Pacific Ocean. Its narrowest point is about sixty miles across.

At the same time, Li's choices were somewhat limited: The western side of the gulf would be too far for any kind of rapid response in Korea, and it would leave most of the sea's coastline at risk. A more obvious base on the Liaodong Peninsula, Port Arthur, the contemporary port city of Dalian, was perhaps too close to the enemy; Russia was in striking distance. Surrounded by territory strongly held by the Qing government, Weihaiwei made sense for the Beiyang Fleet.

The almost inevitable conflict came in 1894. The catalyst came from a quasi-religious, anti-foreign, anti-corruption uprising in Korea called the Tonghak Rebellion.⁵ Both China and Japan were looking for an excuse to enter Korea militarily, and it was the Chinese who moved first, convincing the Korean king that China's help was necessary to quell the uprising.⁶ At that point, Japan's Diet, its chief law-making body, had already resolved that military action on the part of China in Korea would also mean that Japan must take similar action. In June 1894, troops from both sides arrived on the peninsula.⁷ Li's strategy in Korea differed from that of Japan in that, despite his troop deployment, his intention was to avoid a confrontation.⁸ The Japanese went to fight.

Hostilities broke out on July 23, when Japanese forces took the Korean king prisoner.⁹ Sporadic battles occurred over the next few months. China and Japan had their first naval face-off on September 17, at the mouth of the Yalu River, the modern border between North Korea and China.¹⁰ Although it was a fair fight in ships and armament, the more experienced and better-trained Japanese fleet routed the Chinese.¹¹ Japan continued its attack by pushing into Chinese territory. By late January 1895, it was ready to hit the fleet's base at Weihaiwei.¹² Following a combined siege and the sinking or capture of all the Chinese fleet's major ships, on February 12, Weihaiwei fell to the Japanese.¹³ Admiral Ding Ruchang, a cavalry officer who had been assigned to head the navy under Li Hongzhang's command, committed suicide.¹⁴ A full-scale replica of his flagship, the *Ting-yuen* (*Ding Yuan*), is now a tourist attraction near Weihai's main ferry pier.

His navy sunk or captured by the Japanese, Li had to fall back on his diplomatic skills to limit the nation's losses. Japan had moved against

Korea but ended up with territorial gains in China. According to the Treaty of Shimonoseki, China ceded parts of the Liaodong Peninsula (now Liaoning Province) and the island of Formosa (now Taiwan) to Japan in perpetuity, but there was no permanent granting of territory in Shandong.¹⁵ Although not occupied long term, Weihaiwei as a proud base for a China's maritime fighting force instead became a monument to weakness and defeat.

Other nations with interests in northern China were not about to permit Japan to suddenly take control of large swathes of territory, regardless of how they had been acquired. This resulted in the "Triple Intervention" by Russia, Germany, and France. On April 23, they suggested that Japan withdraw from the Liaodong Peninsula, thereby stepping down from a menacing posture and allowing the area to remain peaceful.¹⁶ Japan, having had the upper hand against China but not quite ready to take on the combined force of three European nations, decided that pulling back was the best solution and, by the end of 1895, had withdrawn from most of northern China.¹⁷

The war bent but did not break the Qing dynasty although it was mortally wounded in the process. Three years later, China took a practical approach to paying off the crippling reparations demanded by Japan following the 1894–95 war and, in order to raise revenue began granting land concessions and approving infrastructure projects that would give foreign countries, especially European ones, a greater foothold along China's coast.¹⁸

Weihaiwei's profile had been raised by its service as the Beiyang Fleet's home port. That made it a much more obvious choice as a southern gulf harbor to occupy, in order to counterbalance Russia's presence on the northern side.¹⁹ Also, while Britain had the best piece of real estate on the Chinese coast—Hong Kong—its holdings were concentrated in the far south of the country. Russia, Germany, and Japan are in the relative geographic neighborhood, so Britain's absence in the eastern gulf put it far from sea approaches to Peking, from the emerging port of Shanghai, and from the foreign settlements at Tianjin.

Acquired at the same time that Britain took a ninety-nine-year lease on the New Territories, north of Hong Kong, Weihaiwei seemed to be included simply because it was available. Along with that tract in southern China, Britain took up colonial residency on the Shandong coast on July 1, 1898. Very early in its time as a British territory, Weihaiwei became essentially irrelevant. Aside from continuing

puzzlement in some government factions about why the area had been acquired in the first place, expenses from the 1902 Boer War seem to have canceled any large-scale improvement plans for Weihaiwei.²⁰ The nearby port of Chefoo was opened to all international powers equally and had better facilities, a deeper harbor, and superior rail connections.²¹ Within two years of the territory being ceded to the UK, Parliament had already decided that it would not be fortified. That essentially relegated it to minor status within the empire and certainly among the China territories.

One author described Weihaiwei as “This most absolutely forgotten of imperial outposts.”²² For an empire that included mid-ocean rocks like St. Helena, where Napoleon spent his final days, that is quite the designation. It seems positively generous compared to the way a British colonial administrator named Reginald Fleming Johnston wrote about it during his first tour of service there, giving it an ignominious place in the hierarchy of the empire.

The British robe of empire is a very splendid and wonderfully variegated garment. It bears the gorgeous scarlets and purples of the Indies, it shimmers with the diamonds of Africa, it is lustrous with the whiteness of our Lady of Snows, it is scented with the spices of Ceylon, it is decked with the pearls and soft fleeces of Australia. But there is also—pinned to the edge of this magnificent robe—a little drab-colored ribbon that is in constant danger of being dragged in the mud or trodden underfoot, and is frequently the object of disrespectful gibes. This is Weihaiwei.²³

Despite Johnston’s unflattering description of the place, his posting to Weihaiwei as a junior administrator under Governor Stewart Lockhart was a dream job for him. A consummate Sinologist, he made copious observations of village life, religious and traditional practices, and community judicial processes.²⁴ He compiled his early work into his 1910 book, *Lion and Dragon in Northern China*.²⁵ After his stint at Weihaiwei, Johnston held his most famous post, as tutor to the Qing dynasty’s last emperor, Aisin-Gioro Puyi, during the time after Puyi abdicated but before his expulsion from the Forbidden City. Johnston was not hopeful that Weihaiwei would develop much beyond the point at which Britain had leased it. “The past history of Weihaiwei is not such as to justify very high expectations of a bright future. It has never tasted the sweets of commercial prosperity and perhaps it is hardly likely to do so in days to come.”²⁶

Even other colonial powers with Chinese coastal concessions were unsure of what the British were thinking. The move “indicated a departure from that practical common sense with which Englishmen were usually credited,” Kaiser Wilhelm II told the British ambassador in May 1898.²⁷ What probably kept Weihaiwei from making an even more rapid departure from the annals of British colonial history was its climate.²⁸ Compared to the sweltering heat of other British possessions in the Far East—Hong Kong, Malaysia, and Singapore—Weihaiwei was a sort of Asian Isle of Wight.²⁹ The Royal Navy was fond of the location as a summer training ground.

Weihaiwei almost returned to China in 1906. The terms of its lease specified that it could remain in British hands only as long as the Russians held Port Arthur. Their defeat in the Russo-Japanese War of 1905 saw that area transferred to the Japanese. However, British Foreign Secretary Sir Edward Grey dismissed a Chinese request for Weihaiwei’s return, stating that, although the Russians were gone, the territory was still held by Japan, not China.³⁰ In the 1910s, the question of returning Weihaiwei came up twice: first with the Chinese revolution in 1911, which, if anything, convinced Britain to hold onto it a little longer; and in World War I. During and after the war, the territory’s role was considered and reconsidered as a bargaining chip, for purposes such as getting China to remove German nationals and German possessions, and perhaps to be given back to China or handed to Japan for that nation’s assistance in attacking German possessions in Asia.³¹ Johnston at this point favored giving Weihaiwei back. None of these considerations led to any transfer of sovereignty.

Weihaiwei’s one enduring value beyond being a holiday spot was as a bargaining chip. It made Britain a part of any discussion on European holdings in northern China, and any resistance by one power gave it the chance to be similarly uncooperative. The Shandong colony’s return to Chinese sovereignty began at the Washington Naval Conference. Both Japan and France pledged to return Chinese coastal holdings, leading Britain finally to decide it was time to unload Weihaiwei although the Royal Navy was fairly specific in requesting that it receive some sort of privileges to continue using it as a base and exercise ground.³²

During the negotiations, China’s government fell into disarray, as warlordism rose and as who spoke for a unified China became unclear. Britain refused to sign an agreement with anyone not representing more than just a warlord faction, and again, Weihaiwei’s

future remained in British hands.³³ In 1929, negotiations convened again, and final terms were reached, allowing the Royal Navy to keep its summer base and training area under a ten-year lease; the British government would finally be free of an outpost that it never really seemed interested in having in the first place.

Island Life

Due to its pleasant climate and opportunities for good, clean fun, the naval installation was in most ways a sailor’s delight:

A certain type of naval man may feel inclined to grumble in moments of depression at the absence of facilities for indulging in the festivities he enjoys at many other ports in the East, but even he generally admits that from the point of view of healthfulness, Weihaiwei in the summer is not to be equaled.³⁴

For its administrators, Weihaiwei was essentially a long-term summer vacation. Except when the navy arrived in the summer, foreign inhabitation rarely exceeded two hundred.³⁵ Governor Lockhart amused himself by writing letters to Johnston, who was posted in the south of the colony, and the two made up stories to pass the time when they were not occupied with basic duties like taxation.³⁶ Lockhart, and especially Johnston, saw Weihaiwei more as an anthropological laboratory to observe Chinese village life. Therefore, they kept most of the political structures in the territory intact. Except for occasionally intervening when village elders or other local institutions could not resolve a dispute, Chinese life in Weihaiwei continued without outside interference.

Weihaiwei’s rendition became a little-referenced forerunner to the handling of Hong Kong. Liu Gong Island could be considered the original Special Administrative Region although the presence of the Royal Navy would have made it seem like it had less than a high degree of autonomy.³⁷ However, in the case of the Shandong colony, Britain had the upper hand in negotiations. The talks focused far more on whether or not to give Weihaiwei back and less on post-handover specifics unrelated to the Royal Navy. The territory’s residents remained Chinese citizens, as they had under the Qing dynasty, and later, the republic. Because the political system had changed little under the British, there was minimal bluster over what would happen after they departed. It spared both sides the questions of citizenship

and residency that many faced during the Hong Kong handover.³⁸ The handover ceremony took place on October 1, 1930, Reginald Fleming Johnston, who had returned to serve as Weihaiwei's last colonial governor, presided over the return of sovereignty to China before sailing to Hong Kong, in a bit of geopolitical foreshadowing of events sixty-seven years later. On the same day nineteen years later, a new flag would be raised over all of China, setting up the eventual return of all foreign colonies by the end of the century.

For the purposes of submarines—a class of vessel for which there was no consideration at the time the land was leased and readied as a naval base—any base in the Gulf of Pechihli was practically too shallow. It has an average depth of only 25 meters (82.5 feet). During peacetime, this was not a particular problem. But because modern submarines reached on average ninety meters (three hundred feet) or more in length, including HMS *Poseidon*, such shallow water created significant maneuvering challenges. “There is never much water in this wading pond. We have to be careful with our angle on dives to keep from plowing into the bottom,”³⁹ one submarine commander later wrote.

Aside from strategic considerations, Liu Gong Island had remained leased to the UK in large part because its weather provided welcome respite for submarine crews already drained from the stifling heat inside boats that served before air-conditioning became standard. HMS *Poseidon*'s Galpin wrote a few years earlier:

The problem of habitability is enormously complicated by war in tropical waters; it is no use providing large mess decks and wardrooms if the temperature is so high that the personnel suffer from heat stroke and similar troubles. The sea covers nearly all the pressure hull, and sometimes that water is definitely warm and keeps the submarine at a steady high temperature.

It is this wet heat that causes heat stroke, and so the first problem is how to dry the air, not how to reduce the temperature.⁴⁰

Although the air surrounding Weihai would not be considered arid, the cool waters would have gone a long way to keeping the crew more comfortable.

By the time that *Poseidon* and the other *Parthian*-class boats arrived in late 1930, they had missed the party. However, the game in northern China had also changed. When Weihaiwei came into British hands in 1898, France, Germany, Russia, Japan, and the UK were all vying for Chinese territory. By 1931, the Qing dynasty had

fallen; the Japanese had defeated the Russians and taken over many of their possessions in northeastern China; France and Germany had withdrawn. Only twenty years after the publication of Johnston's book on Weihaiwei, the struggle for northern China had become one between the Lion and the Rising Sun, and, despite the Lion having a naval base near the southern entrance to the gulf, the Rising Sun was very much in ascendancy. Given British holdings and interests in the Pacific, planning for future conflict in Asia began to include facing Imperial Japan.

Poseidon's crew found their summer base pleasant enough. They argued over how to pronounce the name. “The officers pronounce it Way Hi Way, we say Wee Hi Wee, and the Chinaman says Way Hi Wee,” Walter Jeffery wrote.⁴¹ Based on today's pronunciation, in this case the officers were correct. Although not the carnival of sensual delights the motivated navy crew may have found in Hong Kong or Singapore, the Liu Gong Island base offered diversions such as hockey, cricket, football (soccer), and tennis.⁴² The submariners enjoyed good food at the navy canteen and could buy fresh fruit including “raspberries, strawberries, oranges and peanuts at ridiculously low prices,” and got about using rickshaws. On weekends, men could explore the walled city of Weihaiwei, on the opposite shore of the harbor, or borrow a boat and find a secluded beach to go swimming.⁴³

I liked Weihaiwei very much. I didn't mind the extra exercises we had to do with the fleet—we were often out at sea until sunset and by the time we got back alongside the *Medway* [the submarine flotilla's depot ship] it was too late to go ashore, but most of our weekends were free and full of sport. After dark we had fun in the bowling alley in the canteen. We called it “Navies Billiards,” and by the time we had consumed a few pints of beer, it would be pouring out of us in the form of perspiration—we usually finished our game in our birthday suits.⁴⁴

The summer anchorage was not always so much fun. The harbor's relative exposure often meant surface chop, even in a moderate breeze. Because the submarines were tied up to the submarine tender, the cruise ship-sized HMS *Medway*, crews were often sent back to their boats in order to anchor them safely elsewhere. This process, especially when it interrupted the evening meal and shower routine after a full day of exercises, ran counter to the otherwise relaxed atmosphere of the seasonal training grounds.⁴⁵

The British built the island's other most prominent structures, and many of those buildings remain in active use. The steel pier once used by Royal Navy cruisers extends towards the Shandong mainland like a welcoming hand. The former Kings Hotel greets visitors just stepping off the ferry although they may neither visit it nor lodge there; China's navy reserves it for itself. Similarly, barracks that once housed Royal Navy enlisted men still look out over Weihai Harbor although young Chinese sailors getting their sea legs now utilize them. All along the southern end of the island, and climbing up away from the waterfront, are British-built stone houses still inhabited by a few thousand residents. They are allowed to pass them down through their family but are prohibited from selling or renting the houses due to the Chinese Navy's continuing use of large parts of Liu Gong Island.

By the time *Poseidon* arrived on station in Weihaiwei in early May 1931, the Japanese fleet included 6 battleships, 4 battle cruisers, 4 aircraft carriers, 104 destroyers, and 67 submarines.⁴⁶ Although the aircraft carrier HMS *Hermes* joined other surface ships and the *Odin*- and *Parthian*-class submarines on station in Weihaiwei in the summer of 1931, the Royal Navy force there could do little more than keep an eye on their northern neighbors and give them pause about any planned moves on the Shandong Peninsula. For *Poseidon*'s men, it meant a summer of exercises, diving, surfacing, and attacking, routine work for a submarine crew, and perhaps some sun and fun in between.

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Index

- Ah Hai, 4, 50, 53, 56–8, 61–2, 65, 94, 137, 190
Arnold, Walter, 88
Arsenal Football Club, 8, 136, 176
Atwell, Pamela, 107, 127
Awa Maru, 151–2
- Bagley, Arthur J., 190
Balshaw, Robert, 190
Bambridge, Elsie, 14
Barrow-in-Furness, 14, 16, 21–2, 43, 130, 182
Bartlett, Kasyan, 115–9, 127
Bartlett, Magnus, 115
Bartlett, Peter Joseph Howell, 115–6, 118–9, 170
Bayswater, 112
Beaumont, Charles J., 17, 85, 190
Beijing, 105, 117, 119, 121, 127, 136, 143–4, 160–1, 164–5, 172, 176–7, 180
Beijing National Library, 137
bends, *see* decompression sickness (DCS)
Bohai Sea (*see also* Gulf of Pechihli), 2, 8, 109, 121, 143, 146, 162, 178
Bolus, Guy H., 87–9, 91
Bowen, Gerald P., 69
Bowers, Robert C., 17, 190
Brodie, Charles G., 76
British Library, 126
Buck, Pearl S., 7–8
Burnett, Robert L., 76
- caisson disease, *see* decompression sickness (DCS)
Calloway, Cab, 7
Capes, John, 90, 170–5
Capone, Al, 7
Carter, Edward W., 189
Carter, Harry, 189
Causeway Bay, 142
Chapman, Herbert, 8
Charlton, George, 189
Chefoo, *see* Yantai
Chiang, Kai-shek, 8
Clarke, David, 176–7, 182
Clarke, Jacqui, 102
Clarke, Jo, 176
Clarke, Reginald T., 4, 45, 50–3, 56–8, 61–2, 65, 84, 93–5, 102, 130, 189
Cliff, Harold, 17, 191
Cocks, Francis, 119, 167
Cole, George H., 189
Collings, Amos D., 16, 85, 182, 191
Cook, William F., 101, 189
County Cork, Ireland, 3–4, 15–6
Crete, 170
CSS H. L. Hunley, 149
Cussler, Clive, 149

- The Daily Mail*, 103
The Daily Telegraph, 180–1
 Dalian, 29, 121, 155, 162, 178
 Danckworts, Victor H., 76
 Davies, Stephen, 160–1, 165
 Davis, Robert H., 48–9, 57, 59, 62, 73, 92, 171
 Davis Submarine Escape Apparatus (DSEA), 42, 45, 47–9, 56–7, 85, 114, 132–3, 171
 decompression sickness (DCS), 53–5, 92–3, 95, 103, 172, 175–6
 Dowling, Frank, 16, 191
 Dowling, Vera, 16
 Dowse, John, 77–80
 Doyle, Paul, 122
 Draken, Paul, 138
 Dunford, Alfred J., 189

Eridano, 170

 Farley, Percy, 42, 102, 189
 Fegen, Edward, 77
 Finsbury Park, 16, 136
 Fisher, Mel, 2
 Fisher, Norman Warren, 16, 189
 Fleuss, Henry 48,
 Flood, Walter S.A., 189
 Fort Blockhouse, 45, 80
 Freemasons, 16
 Fuzhou, 151

 Gaines, Ernest C., 17, 191
 Gallico, Paul, 2
 Galpin, Bernard William, 11–4, 16, 22–3, 34, 39–43, 50, 65, 68–84, 96–101, 115, 118, 126–8, 130, 169, 185, 189
 Galpin, Christopher, 11, 126
 Galpin, Francis W., 11
 Galpin, Helen, 14, 83, 86, 96, 100
 Galpin, John, 85, 96, 100, 118, 128

 Galpin, Mary, 11
 George V, King, 8
 Gosport, 50, 84, 116–7, 123, 130, 139
 Grabham, Frederick Francis James, 16, 39, 74, 77–8, 189
 Gray, Allen, 15, 191
 Greening, Charles Woolven, 16, 37, 39–40, 69–70, 72–5, 77, 80, 101, 146, 189
 Grills, Thomas V., 15, 191
 Gu, Longsheng, 144, 151, 184–5
 Gulf of Pechihli (*see also* Bohai Sea), 8, 28, 34, 37, 45, 66

 Halsall, John E., 42, 190
 Hayes, Nigel, 122
 Heath, Edward, 119–120, 159, 167
 Heqing Hotel, 122, 129, 156, 161, 164–5, 177,
 Hews, George C., 4, 50–2, 57–62, 65, 76, 133, 191
 Higginbottom, Allan, 190
 Hitler, Adolf, 7
HMS Alliance, 117
HMS Berwick, 43, 63
HMS Brazen, 88
HMS Bruce, 76
HMS Cachalot, 101
HMS Capetown, 102
HMS Caradoc, 76
HMS Cumberland, 76
HMS Dolphin, 12, 50, 117
HMS Dreadnought, 11
HMS Exmouth, 15
HMS H31, 12, 14, 80
HMS H47, 88
HMS Hereward, 101
HMS Hermes, 36, 43, 63, 101, 114
HMS Hyperion, 101
HMS Impregnable, 15, 102
HMS L9, 12
HMS L11, 14, 80

- HMS L12, 88
 HMS M2, 13, 87, 101
 HMS Marazion, 38, 43, 108
 HMS Medway, 35, 37, 69
 HMS Orpheus, 10
 HMS Osiris, 69
 HMS Otus, 10
 HMS Pandora, 25, 170
 HMS Parthian, 25, 108, 169–170
 HMS Perseus, 25, 43, 90, 102, 115, 150, 169–171, 177
 HMS Phoenix, 170
 HMS Poseidon, 1–2, 4, 14, 17, 21, 24–5, 34, 43, 63, 90, 92, 101–3, 108–9, 117, 130, 137–8, 141–2, 147–8, 169–170, 177, 181, 187
 HMS Proteus, 25, 170
 HMS Ravalpindi, 83, 101
 HMS Renown, 11
 HMS Suffolk, 69,
 HMS Thetis, 88–9
 HMS Thunderbolt, *see* HMS Thetis
 HMS Truculent, 91
 HMS Tyrian, 101
 HMS Victory, 183
 HMS Warspite, 12
 Ho Shung, 4, 50, 57–62, 65, 149, 191
 Holt, Edmund G., 4–5, 50–3, 56–61, 65, 84, 92–4, 130, 190
 Hong Kong, 20, 27, 30, 32–5, 37, 62–4, 67, 84–5, 105–6, 115, 119, 133, 135, 140, 143, 160, 185–6
 Hong Kong Central Library, 140
 Hong Kong Telegraph, 63–4, 140
 Hoover, Herbert, 7
 Horton, Max, 12

 Imperial War Museum, 116
 Iyeshi, T., 39–40, 42–43, 79, 82

 Jacobsen, Maria, 149
 Jeffery, Walter 10, 15, 22, 24, 35, 42–3, 57, 60–2, 66–7, 83–4, 102, 170, 175–76, 190
 Johnson, Percy, 190
 Johnston, Reginald Fleming, 31–5, 127
 Jones, Arthur, 161, 164
 Jones, Luther, 161, 164

 Kefallonia, 170–1, 173, 175
 Kennedy, Edward, 101
 Keogh, Maurice, 77–80
 Kew, 112, 125
 Kipling, Rudyard 14

 Lake Khovsgol, 160, 176
 Lanfranco, Edward, 105–7
 Law, Noah, 101–2, 190
 Layton, Geoffrey, 69
Le Sous-Marin blessé, see Men Like These
Lisbon Maru, 106
 Liu Gong Island, 8, 33–7, 66, 122–4, 127, 139, 153, 155–7, 159–162, 164–6, 177–8, 180, 183
 Lockhart, Stewart, 31, 33
 London, 2, 8, 15, 64–5, 103, 112–3, 115–7, 119–20, 125–7, 129, 131–6
 Lovock, Arthur J., 4–5,

 MacDonald, Ramsay, 8
 Malcolmson, George, 118–20, 123, 128, 130, 136
 Marrack, Hugh R., 75–7
 Mars, Alistair, 170
 Maugham, Somerset, 11
Maya, 170
 McInnes, Stanley, 190
 McIntyre, R. A., 69
Men Like These, 131–6

- Merton & Sutton Cemetery, 103
 Merton Park Film Studios, 103
 Mikonos, 170
 Momsen, Charles, 89–90
 Momsen Lung, 90
 Morris, Thomas, 67, 101, 136, 190
 Moser, Marcel-Kurt, 172
 Moss, Michael, 172, 176
 Mussolini, Benito, 7
- Nagle, Vincent, 4, 16, 50–3, 56–7,
 59, 61–2, 65, 76, 84, 93–5, 99,
 101, 128, 130, 190
Naiade, 101
 National Archives (UK), 112, 118,
 125
 Nicolay, Edward C. F., 116, 170,
 173–4
North-China Daily News, 64, 85,
 137
 Niushan Island (Turnabout Island),
 151
- Oram, Joe, 88
- Paine, Albert V., 191
Parthian-class submarine, *see HMS*
Parthian
 Peate, Ruth, 16
 Peking Man, 151–2
 Perperell, Arthur W., 190
 Pike, William H. H., 16, 60, 86,
 191
 Pointer, Frederick T., 191
 Portsmouth, 15, 25, 84, 89, 117,
 120, 127, 128, 132
 Potter, Leonard F., 76
 Prentice, James Douglas, 14
 Pyne, William R., 85, 191
- Raise the Titanic*, 149
 Rawlings, Valentine J. S., 190
 Richards, Walter Charles, 189
- Ridsdale, Doreen, 176–7
RMS Titanic, 16, 106, 151
 Rock, Franck J., 190
 Roebing, John, 55
 Roebing, Washington, 55
 Royal Navy Submarine Museum,
 116–7, 127, 139, 148, 152,
 157–8, 163, 176,
 Ryall, Julian, 180–2
- Sandercock, Charles, 42, 101, 190
 Seaward, Sydney, 131, 133–5
 Shandong Province, 1, 10, 28, 30,
 32–3, 36–7, 121
 Shanghai Salvage Bureau, 150–1,
 183, 185
 Shaw, Frank, 88
 Shaw, Raymond Thorndike, 16, 85,
 101, 189
 Sherrocks, Sidney, 15, 191
 Siebe, Gorman and Co., 48, 132–3
 Sinclair, Edward, 190
 Sino-Japanese War Museum, 122
 Smith, Frederick J. H., 190
 Smith, Sydney, 190
South China Morning Post, 64, 140
SS Divina, 91
SS Kiangya, 106
SS Rawalpindi, *see HMS Rawalpindi*
SS Shuntien, 83
SS Yuta, 38–45, 55, 57, 63, 69–82,
 108, 114–5, 137
 Summers, Walter, 131
- Tate, Andrew, 178–80
 Taylor, Ernest Richard, 190
The Poseidon Adventure, 2
 Thoctarides, Kostas, 169
 Tolliday, Frederick K. C., 15, 136,
 182, 191
Trapped in a Submarine, *see Men*
Like These
 Turner-West, Debbie, 128–30

- U-869, 150
 Union Bar & Grille, 180
 USS *Housatonic*, 149
 USS *Squalus*, 90
 USS *Tang*, 91
- Victoria, Queen, 8
- Washington Naval Treaty, 8, 10,
 19–20, 32
- Weekes, Nelson Ward Hampton, 76
- Weihai (*see also* Weihaiwei), 66,
 107–8, 120–2, 129, 138, 140,
 143, 146, 148, 155–6, 160–4,
 170, 177–8, 180–3, 185–6
- Weihai Archives, 122, 148, 162, 186
- Weihaiwei (*see also* Weihai), 8, 16,
 27–38, 63–7, 83, 86–7, 115,
 119, 127, 163, 167, 181
- Wenger, Arsene, 176
- Wethy, Edwin H., 76, 81
- Wheeler, Aubrey John, 76, 78, 80–1
- Whitley, William, 191
- Willis, Julia, 5, 103
- Willis, Mary, 103–4
- Willis, Patrick Henry “Spike”, 3–5,
 14–6, 45, 47, 50–3, 56–62, 65,
 75, 78, 84–6, 92–4, 102–3,
 126–7, 130–1, 133–4, 190
- Winter, Albert R., 15, 43, 65, 85,
 120, 123, 129, 155, 158, 161,
 164–6, 180, 183, 190
- Yan, Xueli, 148
- Yantai, 28, 31, 121, 143–7, 183,
 185
- Yao, Crayon, 138
- Yetman, Claude B., 190
- Zakynthos (Zante), 170, 172–3
- Zhang, Jianguo, 122, 148, 154, 181

