

THE NARROWS (The Narrers)

Words & Music by Bob Watson

Easy & Free; Not too fast

Verse



1 It was six - ty years a - go, but I still re - mem - ber
2 There was Mal - ta laid a - lone, hos - tile shores on ev - 'ry



well, In all my days on earth I've ne - ver been so close to
side, Re - sist - ance would be en - ded if she did - n't get sup -



hell, And it some - times still sur - pri - ses me I
plied, And her last chance was a con - voy that went



ev - er lived to tell Of that pas - sage down by
sai - ling from the Clyde, Run - ning Mal - ta's food and

Chorus



Tu - nis called the Nar - rows. (2) There was
fu - el through the Nar - rows, Those were



hard old times we knew, back in Au - gust 'for - ty



two, For the en - e - my did - n't fight with bows and



ar - rows, No they gave it to us hot, threw in ev - ry thing they'd



got, When we took that Mal - ta con - voy through The Nar - rows.

THE NARROWS

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It were *** sixty *** years ago, but I still remember well,
In all my days on earth I've never been so close to hell,
And it sometimes still surprises me I ever lived to tell
Of that channel down by Tunis called the Narrows.

*** 60 years in 2002. 70 in 2012

There was Malta laid alone, hostile shores on every side,
Resistance would be ended if she didn't get supplied;
And her last chance was the convoy that went sailing from the Clyde
To run her food and fuel through the Narrows.

Chorus: Those were hard old times we knew, back in August '42,
For the enemy didn't fight with bows and arrows;
No they gave it to us hot, threw in everything they'd got,
When we took that Malta convoy through The Narrows.

I was in the **Melbourne Star**, one of fourteen merchant men,
Mighty escort ranged around us like you'll never see again;
As we sailed across the Med – the Axis Lake they called it then –
Took a lifeline out to Malta through the Narrows.

Deucalion and The **Eagle** were sunk by submarines,
But the rest of us kept sailing, making speed and making steam,
Knowing well that there was worse to come when Tunis laid abeam,
And the Axis had us cornered in the Narrows. **Chorus**

Now Bomb Alley's what they called it, very soon we found out why –
You couldn't see the clouds at times for warplanes in the sky;
For the Axis fancied Malta theirs for taking by and by,
If they stopped our convoy getting through the Narrows.

So they really pulled the trigger as we passed the Skerki Bank,
Clan Fergusson and **Cairo** and the **Empire Hope** they sank;
But their battleships kept clear, we had our lucky stars to thank –
They'd have made us into mincemeat in the Narrows. **Chorus**

As we sailed around Cape Bon, waiting e-boats by the shore
Sent a cruiser and six merchantmen down to the ocean floor;
And the burning waters round us nearly added to the score
Of the vessels lost in passing through the Narrows.

Pantellaria lay astern, with Valetta drawing near,
But the Axis kept on trying, so we still weren't in the clear,
With **Ohio** far behind us, broken back and steering gear --
Two destroyers brought her homeward from the Narrows. **Chorus**

To the harbour of Valetta but five cargo ships came through:
Port Chalmers and the **Castle** and the two **Star** sisters too,
With **Ohio** scarcely floating – how she made it no one knew --
Still she'd brought her precious fuel through the Narrows.

It were *** 60 *** years ago, but I clearly still recall,
How Operation Pedestal saved Malta from a fall;
And I'd count myself a lucky one to still be here at all
When there's better men laid resting in the Narrows. **Chorus**

BACKGROUND

In the summer of 1942, the island of Malta was laid alone in the centre of a sea controlled by Axis navies and air forces, and surrounded on all sides by territories either supporting or occupied by Axis forces; desperately short both of food for her population and fuel for planes to repel the constant enemy air attacks. In recognition of bravery in the face of such adversity, the entire Island was awarded the George Cross.

Several previous supply convoys had failed to get through and by August a final effort was needed to alleviate a situation fast becoming impossible. This one – escorted by some forty warships – did at last manage to run some supplies to Malta – albeit at appalling cost. Out of the fourteen specially selected merchant ships that set sail, only five made it to Valetta, but their contributions enabled the island to remain in Allied hands until successes in the North African desert and the beaches at Anzio began the process of turning the tide.

The story of Malta's gallant resistance and the convoy that helped to prolong it are subjects wide-ranging enough to fill several books. This song (a survivor's tale) seeks to etch in the background and describe the voyage of the convoy that just HAD to get through. The outcome of the war might well have been very different had "Operation Pedestal" not succeeded.