

# **FIFTEEN NAVAL OFFICERS DISMISSED THE SERVICE**

## **Walked Off H.M.S. Fifeness & Refused To Rejoin Her**

### **PORTSMOUTH COURT=MARTIAL ACCOMMODATION STORY**

FIFTEEN British naval officers who walked off H.M.S. Fifeness at New York on January 30 because they objected to the accommodation provided and refused to rejoin her were yesterday dismissed the Service at a Portsmouth court-martial.

All had pleaded "Not guilty" to three charges accusing them of failing to take passage, improperly leaving the Fifeness, and disobeying an order to re-embark.

They were all found guilty on all the charges.

President of the Court was Capt. C.L. Firth, R.N., of H.M.S. Mercury.

The officers were: -

Temp. Lieut. D.S. Gibson, R.N.V.R OF Elmcroft Drive, Surbiton, Surrey  
Temp. Lieut.(S) I.F.S. Pearson, R.N.R., of College-place, Belfast.  
Temp. Sub-Lieut. J.I. Lundie, R.N.V.R., of Lake's Lane, Newport, Pagnell, Bucks  
Temp. Sub-Lieut. G. Galbraith, R.N.V.R., of Harleston Road, Cosham. Portsmouth  
Sub-Lieut (E) A.B. Auld, R.N.V.R., of Hillwood, Larbert, Scotland  
Sub-Lieut (S) g. McLaughlan, R.N.R., of Milton Road, Kilbirnie, Ayrshire  
Sub-Lieut (E) D. Moore, R.N.V.R., of Shipbank, Lyle Street, Greenock  
Sub-Lieut, (E) J.T. Sage, R.N.V.R., of Cunloden Drive, Glasgow  
Sub-Lieut. (E) N. Fielding, R.N.V.R. of Stirling Road, Bolton, Lancs  
Sub-Lieut (E) S.L. Hamilton, R.N.V.R. of Donard Street, Ravenhill Road, Belfast  
Sub-Lieut. (E) L. Hewitt, R.N.V.R., of Addington Crescent, North Shields, Northumberland  
Sub-Lieut. (E) G Johanson, R.N.V.R., of Balkwell Avenue, North Shields, Northumberland  
Sub-Lieut. (E) J. McCreight, R.N.V.R., of Lackfield Road, Sydenham, Belfast  
Mr L.S. E. Bartley, temp gunner, R.N. of Argus Road, West Street, Bedminster, Bristol  
Ch. Stwd. E.C.J. Smith, R.N.R. of Clifton Road, Shirley, Southampton

Sub-Lieut. Lundle arrived in an ambulance and walked into the court on crutches.

The Deputy Judge Advocate of the Fleet (Capt. (S) A.J. Wheeler, R.N.) reading the circumstantial letter, said that when the officers arrived on the jetty about 9.45 a.m. on January 30 the captain's secretary of H.M.S. Fifeness (Temp. Lieut. (S) Leedham, R.N.V.R.) showed some lieutenants and lieutenant commanders to their cabins and mentioned that the officers would not be using the wardroom but that a special space had been prepared as a wardroom annexe. He conducted the accused to the accommodation allotted to them. A number of the accused complained to him about the accommodation on the general lines of "We are officers. This is not good enough." But Leedham indicated that he could not deal with the complaint.

## **“NATIVE QUARTERS”**

Actg. Lieut. Commander William Bertie Harvey, R.N., late executive officer of H.M.S. Ruler, who was also to sail in the Fifeness, heard the complaints, which appeared to be:

The sleeping quarters were labelled “native quarters” and their supposed bathroom and lavatory were labelled “native bathroom”, “native latrine”, They had been told they were to mess in their sleeping quarters. They were not to be allowed to use the facilities of the wardroom and they expected excessive vibration in the “native quarters” which they supposed were over the screw.

He reported to Com, Joseph Vivian, R.N.R., commanding officers of the Fifeness who said the accommodation was adequate, and declared he did not intend to make any alteration. At about the time of this interview the accused and Sub-Lieut. (E) Edgar Fredk. Boobyer, R.N.R., left the ship by way of protest, taking their hand luggage. Lieut-Com. Harvey told the accused on the jetty that camp beds would be put in certain cabins, thereby reducing the number who would be required to sleep in the “native quarters” to eight or nine, and that had he been allotted this accommodation he would have accepted it. He then gave them direct personal order to return on board, after telling them to consider carefully the action they were taking.

## **ONE EXCEPTION**

With one exception, Sub-Lieut. Boobyer, however, they remained on the jetty and were there when the ship left at about one o'clock.

The circumstantial letter added that the only thing “native” about the sleeping accommodation was the tally, which gave a false and misleading impression.

First witness, Lieut-Com. Harvey, was asked by Mr Stuart Horner, defending: Do you remember saying to them on the jetty, “Stick it out, boys, you will get back in the Queen Mary yet?”

Lieut-Com Harvey, L No. I did not, that is entirely wrong.

Com. Vivian said no one had previously used the quarters and the accused officers would have had wine bills in the normal manner. Fifeness was a merchant ship of 10,000 tons, converted for the maintenance of landing craft for the Pacific.

“I think it was excellent accommodation suitable for any officer.” The tallies or labels “native quarters” did not convey anything and had been put there by builders.

Com. Vivian said there were four women wardroom passengers.

## **“RATHER UPSET US”**

Temp. Lieut. (E) J.H. Tylor, R.N.R. said that when he saw the accommodation labelled “native quarters” he did not consider it officer-like and he interviewed Lieut-Com, Harvey and was given other accommodation.

Mr Horner: “You said you were not going to sail unless you got something better and the result was you got something better” --- Yes.

Sub-Lieut. Boobyer, the officer who returned to the ship said: "When we were shown to the accommodation we noticed the native' tallies, which rather upset us. The place was clean and tidy, very simple but not crude, and there was very little space to stow gear. The majority of the people who assembled in the after accommodation were T.124X officers."

T124X agreements between the Admiralty and Mercantile Marine officers and ratings for service in auxiliary war vessels bring non-naval personnel under R.N. discipline.

They had learned that another officer, who was not T124X had been given a cabin, "We discussed this point, and this apparent discrimination brought about a decision to protest."

### **"PROBABLY IMAGINARY"**

Capt. K.L. Harkness, R.N. (prosecuting); Why did you see only part of the accommodation> --- I think it was a matter of temperant. I think we were too upset to use complete discretion because of this discrimination against T124X officers and the label "native quarters."

Throughout the passage he was "perfectly well treated," and he did not think now that there was any discrimination. "That which we felt was probably imaginary."

Com. M.E. Butler-Bowden, R.N., of H.M.S. Dryad, described the accommodation as light and airy, clean, and appeared to have been unused.

First witness for the defence, Tempy-Lieut. Douglas Stanley Gibson, who was a sub-lieutenant at the time of the incident, alleged that Lieut-Com. Harvey said: "Yes, the accommodation is terrible. Stick it out and you will get home on the Queen Mary yet."

Sub-Lieut (E) A.B. Auld said that Lieut-Com. Harvey said; "My God" when he saw the accommodation and "did not look very pleased."

Asked: "Can we justify in any way this trooping off and assembling on the jetty?" Lieut. Pearson replied that they went ashore to protest to Lieut. Com. Harvey, who was on the dock side.

### **"GRAVELY UNBECOMING"**

In his speech for the prosecution Capt. Harkness said Britain had no dollars to spare for the subsistence of 15 officers for an entirely unnecessary stay in New York. The Treasury was having "grave difficulties" in meeting its obligations today.

Describing the conduct of the officers as "gravely unbecoming." He said: "It was the grossest in-subordination in its worst form, heavily underlined by their action in decamping. It was deliberate and sustained disobedience."

Mr Horner commented as to the remark about the Treasury, "I don't suppose Mr Dalton would like to hear him say that. It is fallacious to say the least. The last Budge is surely evidence of that.

Mr. Horner added that the officers, "I dare say, may now regret their action, but it was understandable and there is nothing here to show they have been guilty of conduct unbecoming to an officer."

### **ALL RESERVE OFFICERS**

Traditional ceremony of pointing the sword at the accused when found "Guilty" was not used in the trial. Accused were all Reserve officer, and the sword is not a compulsory part of their wartime kit.

One of the dismissed officers told a reported that the T124X agreement had always been "in favour of the Admiralty. You are a civilian so far as any paying-out goes, but when it comes to things like this you are a naval officer."

Another said: "We never knew where we were in the Service but we know we are civilians now."

Mr. Bartley, acting-gunner, R.N. who has been in the Navy since he was 15, is now 39, and was within six weeks of getting his pension. He is married. "I don't know what I'm going to do now," he said.