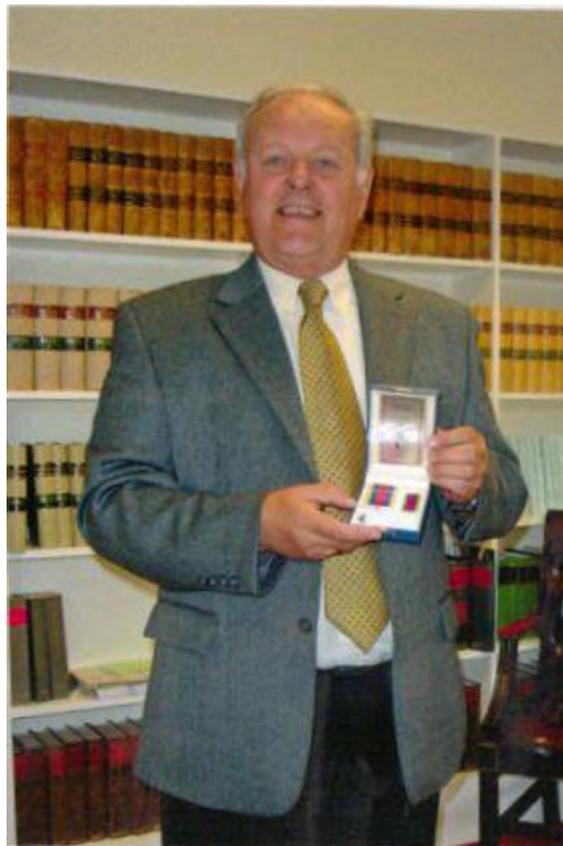


Nelson would have cried

My Navy 1958 – 1968

by

Peter C. Brown



These are just a few jottings and meanderings through my own recollections of my life and times in the Royal Navy. I've tried to be as accurate as my memory will allow so I will offer my apologies in advance for any inaccuracies that may occur. If anyone actually reads this account of my exploits and has more verifiable info it would be gratefully received. All of the ships that I served in will have had their commissions well and truly documented so my intention is not to duplicate that work but simply to commit to paper the important, silly, serious and life changing experiences of the writer. If I have offended anybody, please remember, I meant it.

READ ON REGARDLESS

I had committed the modern cardinal sin; I dropped out of school mid way through taking my 'A' levels and had therefore to set a course for my future. Having spent the last 5 years at a boarding school that specialised in promoting young chaps like me to take up a career in Agriculture it seemed natural that I would follow that ideal. I felt that I had worked really hard during my time at school and as a result had achieved 5 passes at "O" level and the idea was then to proceed with A level studies to ease my way forward into the world of agriculture. About halfway through my A level Zoology, Botany and Geography courses I discovered to my dismay that Writtle College (one of the foremost agricultural colleges in the country) to whom I had applied for my degree studies announced that I must have an O level in Mathematics. You cannot imagine the horror that surrounded me at this point as I'd been directly requested by the head master that of Hadham Hall school not to even attempt maths as I was totally devoid of any expertise in that field. In other words I was rubbish. So no matter the amount of pleading and cajoling, Writtle wouldn't play ball. I dropped out at the halfway stage much to my later regret but I had no direction as what a future career to take. So one bright April morning I started work on a farm as a labourer much to the annoyance of my Mother who'd expected greater things from her little lad.

I'd been working for about six months as a hired slave and had just about enough of the seriously harsh conditions and the desperately low wages - £3.6s.8d per week and was looking for other employment when I came upon an advertisement in the Daily Mirror. My father always read the Daily Mirror and I suppose that it was at that time that I realised that I was only to be considered as a Tory voter from that point on, why I shall never fathom out as my family was at best dirt poor due to my father's heavy drinking. The work on Oyler's farm was hard in the extreme as every action was by hand from the cutting of cabbages to the hoeing of enormous rows of beetroots. It took me a week to get to grips with the hard work and from that point on subversion set in. Most of the men working all lived in tied cottages and therefore couldn't say a word out of place for fear of losing their livelihood but more importantly their homes. There was a lot of forelock tugging even in those days which even then I thought was harsh beyond belief. The whole matter of the Oyler Farm could take up another chapter on its own so I'll leave it there for the moment.

Getting back to the advert - There it was the face of a smiling sailor, a good looking hero obviously imported for the job, talking about rabbits and the world. That's for me a life on the rolling deep I thought and was interested enough to follow this up by going along to a local recruitment office in Waltham Cross. I was met by a very tall Chief Petty Officer sporting lapel badges of the Sick Berth branch who invited me to complete the necessary forms. I still remember him sniggering when I replied to the question of employment by saying quite proudly - "agricultural worker" This done I waited for the next ten days for the

call to come and when it did I had to lie and take as the Aussies put it – take a sickie – much as it turned out to the complete annoyance of my employer George Oyler.

On this day I made my way into to an address London to be subjected to the then rigorous medical examination. We stripped off, were prodded and poked, had every orifice looked into with some vigour I might add. The colour blindness test was a doddle; some however couldn't comprehend the mass of different coloured balls. I never did understand the why I was directed to pull myself up on a horizontal bar only to be asked whether or not I suffered from “piles”. I then sat back and waited for the “call to arms “.

Oddly enough the day that I was about to hand in my notice George got the hump and said that I had to go because I wouldn't work over time on a Sunday morning. I think it was a draw but I was so pleased to get away from that bloke.

There was of course one slight problem in that during the three weeks wait that I had to endure I had NO MONEY which was just a bit off putting to say the least. Thankfully I was given a part time job as a labourer working with my uncle. From day one it was me that ended up with the job of scrapping off flaking plaster from the outside of a Jewish owned townhouse somewhere in darkest London. The job lasted two weeks and by the end of it I'd somehow amassed a fortune - £30. They spoke of a bonus for getting the job done quickly, who knows the reality but I was rich beyond my wildest dreams.

So it was that I met at Paddington station several others travelling to Plymouth for the same reason – to join the Royal Navy- Sailors of the Queen, to defend the empire against the rogues and vagabonds of the world.

We were all fresh faced and young embarking on an adventure of a lifetime. My father had given me his old holdall that a sail maker chum of his had produced during his service in the navy. On reflection I would now say that this holdall made from one single piece of cowhide was a superb feat of manufacture. At the time it was just a bag.

It is a peculiar thing but all of the train journeys that I made before, during and after my service days are all a complete blur with the exception of one, more of which later

Within hours we were to undertake our First water voyage namely the ferry from Plymouth to Torpoint on the other side of the mighty Tamar River. Oh yes this was the life for us on the rolling deep. Yet I cannot for the life of me remember anything about the journey, the weather or my companions. The recruiting chief had done his job well.

Returning to Rabbits, it was only in 2011 on a visit to Chatham Historical Dockyard that I found out where the term had originated. There is in the Chatham dockyard area a small island, which at one time was infested with rabbits, and sailors going on leave were allowed to visit the island to catch one or two to take home as an addition to his family food store. Hence presents in the Navy were from that time referred to as rabbits.

When we arrived at HMS Raleigh it seemed strangely quiet there was hardly any bustle or activity. Only later were we to find out that three quarters of the “ship's company” were on annual leave so we really had a mild introduction into the senior service by comparison to others I suspect.



Raleigh was and is a shore base but still has all the trappings of a normal ship, hence being called a stone frigate. All of the terminology used was highly nautical e.g. to catch a liberty boat – this means that you are actually allowed ashore for a spot of leave. The reality of the situation was that you had to parade before an officer of the watch before being allowed to walk out through the main gates and catch a bus into town.

The pre induction day was all very pleasant and low key with the petty officers in charge showing kindness and consideration to all of the raw recruits. The divisional officer, a senior sub lieutenant would be the nicest way to describe him also seemed quite pleasant and had you into his office for a very informal chat before we were all taken off to the mess hall for an evening meal.

Settling down for the night was for some a bit of an ordeal for some as many of the “men” had not been away from home before nor had they had the dubious pleasure of the shared facilities – loo, showers and dormitory living. PCB had no problems at all as he’d spent the last five years at boarding school where nothing was sacred in terms of personal space and living.

Day one was different firstly those who thought that this was not really the life for them were invited to leave – two did just that leaving a rag tag bunch of about thirty young men to be then inducted in to the senior service. Once having signed on the dotted line people started to change both physically and in attitude. The once beaming jolly petty officer became a huge slathering monster who could scream for England and did just that most of the time.

We marched everywhere, I say marched when in reality we moved as a semi organised rabble from the medical centre to the mess hall and to every conceivable office, shed and building to have our names taken and inserted into the system. Lastly we were given a number.

CJ 980550 will never be forgotten. I was now officially classified as a seaman to be based on and at ships from the Chatham division. My father had been a Chatham sailor as had my two uncles Donald and John Emerson and at one time they had been subject to defaulters, unfortunately my father had the dubious pleasure of being the P.O. in charge of punishment. No wonder they didn't like him! As a Chatham sailor the ratings wore their caps at a jaunty angle slightly to one side and could so easily be recognised. Portsmouth Jacks wore their caps slopping to the back of their heads and Devonport were flat on top. Chatty Chats was the nickname given to Chatham based ships who were always considered the least orderly of any in the Royal Navy but still better than any other navies in the world.

Another piece of kit that was mandatory for all ranks and had to be carried at all times was the Naval Pay Book. This item was the nearest thing to a passport that you could imagine as it contained your photograph, full details about your physical make up, date of birth, official number, and at various stages throughout training certification of achievements such as swimming and surviving the Tear Gas chamber. Your life was in a book to be on your person all of the time and woe betide anyone who when asked to produce the same couldn't. It was almost a shooting offence as this was your only form of I.D. Later the bulky pay book was to be replaced by a rather more standard plastic slim line ID card.

Funny to think that for over ten years I was to carry ID and not worry about it but now some people are screaming Civil Liberties, abuse etc..

By the time that I'd finished basic training the Chatham division had been withdrawn and I was advised that I could now choose either Devonport or Portsmouth as my home division I chose Plymouth for no better reason than I preferred the name. Needless to say I was detailed off to become a Portsmouth division member. Odd how things like that occur in the military. Having achieved the completion of our enrolment into the senior service we were then herded together in one uncoordinated heap.

Class 632 was thus formed and our living accommodation was almost to be considered as the nursery block for it was here that we were to remain for some time before joining in with the rest of the naval population.



Uniforms and all the kit that a sailor would require was issued right down to being given a tube of toothpaste with the letters RN emblazoned on the side (full schedule of kit to be attached at a later stage). One point always sticks in my mind is that we were not issued with shoes, just two pairs of boots one for best and one for generally working in. The issue of shoes only became apparent and allowable once we had finished our training The pair for

general work and guard duty etc., had hob nails and the leather wasn't as finely finished as the "best" pair nonetheless they had to be somehow brought to a highly burnished finish.

Unfortunately for me someone somewhere had been rather enthusiastic with the hammering in of the hob nails as they had reversed the order. My best boots to be used for going ashore and generally adding to your appearance as a sailor of the Queen were the ones that some idiot had hammered in the hobnails. Try as I would the commissary wouldn't under any circumstances change them for a more suitable pair as they had already been issued to me and were therefore "USED" and not to be issued to someone else. Had they changed my boots it would throw the whole system in that I would have effectively been issued with four pairs of boots instead of my allowance of two. How the wheels of bureaucracy clash with common sense still baffles me to this day.

Dancing at the NAAFI in Plymouth therefore became a bit of an adventure when trying to jive in hob nailed boots. It didn't do the floor surface much good but Connie Francis rendition of "Stupid Cupid" hid the yelps and screams of pain from the local lovelies on whose feet we had just stamped.

We were being let ashore for one evening – the terminology was being ground into us at a remorseless rate – and we were to catch the liberty boat at 18.00. In other words we were to leave the establishment by six o'clock in the evening in time to catch the bus which would take us to the ferry at Torpoint. A point to remember is that the navy only quote the time on a twenty four hour clock and do not under any circumstances say "HOURS," only pongos and the like use that terminology.

I suppose we'd been in the Navy for all of four weeks by the time that we were actually granted our first shore leave so to be fair our wearing of a uniform was still a self conscious affair. We showered and shaved and combed and used every kind of deodorant that you could imagine before putting on this strangest of uniforms. I would say that there are probably not many like it in the world.

There were of course trousers. The bell bottomed trousers issued to sailors were odd in that there was not a front fly. What we did have was the main holding up part of the trousers crossed the stomach there to be buttoned then there was a front flap that reached across the whole of the front and secured by four buttons along the top. Taking a pee was an adventure and anything more exotic than that was time hampered. A white front with blue edged rim around the neck was neatly tucked in to the trousers.

Over the top of this went the famous sailor's collar, the one that all of the girls would touch for good luck or so they said. Then on went the naval jumper where you pulled up the built in collar together with the blue jean collar that was underneath to allow you to drape around your neck the black silk scarf as well as a pure white lanyard.

This achieved and all you needed to perform was the tying of the bow that would secure the black silk scarf to the front of the jumper before you wound the lanyard around the whole mess that you'd just made. Simple!!!! Nothing to it.

We assembled outside the chiefs' billet in columns of three all looking and feeling just a bit silly in our black uniforms and the milk bottle hat topping it all off. We hadn't been in the navy long enough to feel comfortable in uniform, only slightly self conscious about it - that would come later when pride kicked in. Our chief petty officer came out to inspect us and then called on one of our company to march the liberty men on to the quarter deck. "OK,

Shorty, you hiding in the middle row come out 'ere" I then knew that it was to be me. "March this rabble over to the quarterdeck and await to be inspected by the OOD (Officer of the Day) "I'd never marched anybody anywhere in my life so the next ten minutes were to be somewhat of an adventure – I would suggest that herding cats would have been slightly less daunting than moving my co liberty men from one place to another.

We assembled as a "smart body of men" on the quarter deck facing the mast and the Ships' figurehead and waited to be inspected by the duty officer before being let loose in the fleshpots of Plymouth. I suppose we'd waited for some five minutes before we all heard the demented, maniacal scream that emanated from the guardhouse – "what the ***** **** do you think you bunch of ***** idiots think you are ***** well doing ". Two extremely red faced people with lots of badges of office and medals and stripes and rings raced towards us demanding to know who had marched this rabble on to the quarter deck. I tried to advise that our chief (Second only to God) had instructed me to march the assembled finest on to the quarter deck. The scream to get off echoed around Raleigh for weeks I'm sure.

I would say at this juncture for those who are not initiated in the ways of the Senior service that the quarter deck on any ship is the holiest of holies and is the playground of the officers and is not to be walked upon let alone stood upon by at least 30 spotty faced youths all expecting to be let out for the evening. We weren't and apparently it was all my fault. Having said that we tried an hour later and after an inspection which took about half an hour our liberty boat came in and so it was off to TORPOINT.

Now Torpoint is not the biggest place in the world and can easily become overrun by youths and lots of hormones. Odd though it may seem we went into pubs and bought pints of beer even though the majority of us had not previously drunk more than half a shandy. We were never questioned about our age by any of the landlords – I was just seventeen and a half.

Everyone of my intake was sent to different living accommodation and I was sent to Frobisher Block. This building was a large ,long, black painted wooden edifice on concrete stilts connected to a huge passageway that joined several other blocks all named after very seriously special naval people. There was just one problem in that we were situated as far from the mess hall and any other facility in the whole of the establishment right out by the perimeter fence.

I hadn't met many people, if any, from north of Cambridge until this day and so the shock was almost overwhelming when I realised that I was the only southerner in amongst at least twenty Geordies three of whom were named Peter. They immediately asked for my second name and from that moment on I was known as Colin. Within two weeks I'd acquired a fairly respectable Geordie accent, so much so that when some new recruits joined us they thought that I was one of the others.

The mix of people could not have been more diverse and by now had blossomed into a group from all parts of the country. God Help the Navy.

We were pushed, shoved, marched and doubled from morning to night and by the end of two months were considering ourselves to be real old salts of the sea until that is the day that we were bussed down to the Tamar River. Their Lordships in their wisdom had decreed

that all new members of the senior service should be able to deal with all aspects of seaboard life including how to use and deal with a naval cutter and whaler. This was probably one of the most difficult parts of our training from a physical stand point. Firstly none of us had ever been on water other than as a passenger except for the two ex fishermen from Hull, and so to be ordered to pick a ten foot long oar and then to march to the quayside was just a bit daunting not to say plain dangerous for anyone standing less than eleven feet from us.

We embarked, fell over, dropped oars and generally caused mayhem even to the point where the shrieking of the P.O.'s had little or no effect on us whatsoever. Order was finally restored and the boat was pushed off into the river ~ rowing a boat is not easy and made even less so when you have 12 people all trying to row in different rhythms at the same time. After an hour of trying to handle a 10 foot oar, the tide and people catching a crab every pull or two, left us absolutely shattered and ready for bed by the end of the day. Pulling a Whaler or Cutter is made more difficult in that the seats aren't on runners and therefore the rowing technique is to use upper body strength only.

Within a short period of time after our initial foray on to the rolling deep rowing (or pulling as we were ordered to call the exercise) we became more of an organised bunch of people and I must say it was one of the more memorable activities at Raleigh.

Just to make sure that when out on the rolling deep we wouldn't drown there was the swimming test to endure and pass. Now this may not sound much, but when you consider that our class was assembled by the swimming pool and to a man we were dressed in our BOILER SUITS with all of the buttons open just so we didn't cheat by trapping air inside to make us more buoyant. A more heinous crime was yet to be perpetrated. More like self preservation as drowning is fairly nasty I understand. Each of us then individually had to lower ourselves into the pool (diving in wasn't allowed as you may gain an unfair advantage and not have to swim the obligatory 50 yards as required) and then by whatever swimming style you wished to adopt you had to get to the other end of the pool without sinking, feet on the bottom or more importantly drowning because there lordships at the Admiralty found that loosing sailors was just a bit untidy and there were too many forms to complete.

Some guys just couldn't swim but struck out bravely until panic set in, this was when they tried to make for the safety of the poolside and the waiting arms of the PTI. This was of course an unknown and soon to be seen hazard as a PTI (always known as clubs because their badge of rank was two Indian clubs crossed) armed with a long pole waited to push them out again. Those that didn't achieve their swimming merit pass had already drunk a lot of the pool but had to return for extra instruction – funnily enough not many people failed at the second attempt. Fear of the pole rather than drowning I suspect. None the less this achievement was entered into the Pay Book.

Thinking back to the two ex fishermen from Hull, it seemed that even then the fishing Industry wasn't faring too well and these two had “escaped” to forge a new career in the Royal Navy. Odd really when they did boast of the days when after a really successful trip they would return to port, take their sizeable pay packets and head for a men's outfitters to buy a new suit which apparently they would wear until the next trip. The suit was then relegated to the position of “working kit” completely wrecked and then thrown away on return to harbour. No money was ever saved, it All went on drinking, chasing the ladies and of course the purchase of a new suit. Hm!!!!!!

Part of the hardening up process both physical and mental was P.E. and boxing. The Navy's sadistic side showed up when one bleak day we were assembled in the vast hanger of a gymnasium and ordered into two lines facing each other and then, in turn had to don the jolly old boxing gloves and go three minutes with the bloke who stood opposite you. You might think that this was easy. Not so, as they made no attempt to size you equally, so a 5 footer might be up against a 6 footer who could easily weigh 3 stone more.

I was paired off with a bloke of about the same dimensions as yours truly and we agreed that we'd take it easy so that no one would get hurt. That's when the rat clobbered me alongside my temple and down I went, I mumbled something incoherent and started to try the sparring lark at which point the sod hit me in the same place again. Down I went like a sack of spuds. When I got up this time the red mist had descended and I took after this bloke with a vengeance and soon he was down on the deck with me trying to kick the very life out of him. The PTI had to wrap his arms round me to stop any further bloodshed. "Stand back lad" was the order from the PTI "let the man get up". This I dutifully did at which point he clobbered me again. That was it and it was a brawl on the canvas yet again. I would point out that I would normally go to out of my way not to have a punch up as I never really ever saw the point of hurting your own knuckles. My mate who I'd trusted to take it easy turned out to have been quite an accomplished amateur boxer, in his time; we actually got on quite well after that.

One thing always noticeable – there was a uniform for every activity and there was no escape from it, it was a relentless activity for twenty four hours of the day. Leaving aside underwear there was no time in the day when a uniform was not applicable. On getting up a shave and shower was the order of the day and to accompany this we used navy towels and navy toothpaste - razors and shaving soap were definitely civilian. After having stowed away in our lockers the navy issue pyjamas we immediately changed into the standard blue denim style working dress, numbered and classified as Number Eights but always referred to as Noz 8's, under which was always worn a white top or blue serge jumper depending on the time of year. White for spring and summer, jumper for the rest.

After having finished the working day, namely at 16.00 it was then time to change into evening wear, this time it was the standard navy uniform without the sailors blue collar – Number Threes.

If we were to go ashore then it was on with the best uniform – Number Ones.

When working on some particularly dirty activity it was on with the boiler suit except that this was worn over the top of the Noz 8's and proved to be uncomfortable especially if it was a bit on the warm side.

Sports were not left out we were issued with two rugby shirts, one blue and one white together with shorts that came down to our knees and white plimsolls.

Rain had its own attire attributed to it. If going ashore the best raincoat in the world – The Burberry – was the order of the day but if it rained during the working day then the smelliest, most unwieldy, uncomfortable garment was worn – The Naval Oilskin which made everyone look like a Dalek from Dr. Who

If working or outside for any reason then Hats were worn at all times. The one overriding memory is that we wore boots and army style khaki gaiters all of the time other

than when playing any form of sport or P.T. or when we went to bed. The boots that were issued to the Navy were totally different from that issued to the other two armed services. Navy boots did not have toecaps and were therefore free from military type of spit and polishing and bullshit except that the whole boot had to have a deep shine not just the front bit.

Very soon we were able to move as a reasonably coherent unit mainly because we had to march or double march everywhere that we wanted to go. I say as a unit, which is not quite true, as with all things in life there is always one person who cannot march in time with everyone else. Our group was no exception we had the bloke who always ended up with both arms out in front of him instead of swinging to and fro like the rest of us. Every time we marched up and down on the parade ground this poor bloke invariably ended the day doubling around the parade ground with his rifle over his head, for what seemed hours. Having said all of that whilst he couldn't march he was the fittest of all the recruits.

Haircuts played a large part of our initiation into the navy in fact we had to have our hair almost planed down to the bone every two weeks whether it was needed or not. The big day for tonsorial murder was divisions. "What are Divisions?"

This is when all of the various departments paraded before the Captain all wearing their best uniforms and having had their hair cut yet again. As can be imagined the call upon the barber the day before divisions was enormous bearing in mind that there must have been three hundred heads to hack, this became evident when at 18.00 on the eve of the big day one of our band of brothers hadn't made it through the barbers door.

We, his comrades, rallied round with shaving soap and razor to assist. The effect was a brilliant straight line across the nape of the neck. Remember that at that time a certain actor by the name of Tony Curtiss was the big screen heart throb and we felt that we had done his image no harm with our efforts to replicate his hairstyle. We were satisfied, our Petty Officer in charge nearly passed out and the divisional Chief Petty Officer was about to cry but didn't he just ranted until I stepped forward and succinctly explained the position. I feel that I was a marked man after that. For a raw recruit to step out of line was basically unheard of, but hey this was the late 1950's for goodness sake we were liberated rock and roll era kids.

Petty Officer Bird didn't like recruits very much and had been seen chasing some unfortunate around the parade ground at the same time as prodding him with the nasty end of a bayonet. The poor bod had probably committed some serious crime like calling a weapon a GUN rather than the accepted term of RIFLE.

Parade grounds anywhere are enormous areas of tarmac about the size of a football pitch at least. We assembled upon this hallowed ground, put into the correct order – shortest in the middle, tallest on the outside edges – and were inspected to make sure that not one piece of kit was out of place, dirty or even forgotten only to then wait for our divisional officer to do it all over again. The idea was to then march around this football pitch like a well oiled machine keeping in time with the band and then at the last minute become as one when passing the Captain on the dais who was taking the salute. If the C wasn't satisfied he would mention this to one of the other officers standing with him who would then growl at a CPO who would write something on a pink slip and hand this to a runner who then dashed forward and handed this to the bod in charge. The upshot of all of this activity was that the offending class had to go round again and again until they got it right. As divisions were just

before lunch the closer it got the more agitated everyone became so there was a lot of shouting. Thankfully this only happened to our class once during our basic training.

We learned about Damage control, fire fighting on board a ship, how to tie a knot suitable for the occasion, how to march, how to clean everything that didn't move out of the way, how to fire a .303 rifle. The list was endless and filled our every waking moment.

The firing range was, apart from shotguns when I was at school, almost the last time that I was allowed to get anywhere near apparatus of death and destruction. Thus we marched to the Butts (firing range) full of high spirits and anticipation of showing that we were the new sharpshooters of the navy and that all others were to look to their laurels. The gunnery sections whether they are small arms ,giant onboard guns able to throw six inch shells many miles or any other projectile launchers are always run and maintained by the Gunnery Instructors – G.Is as they are known and not to be confused at any time with the American armed forces. G.I.s always wore black gaiters for some reason perhaps it matched their moods, and walked straight backed as if they had a broom handle down the back of their jackets. They shouted a lot but I learned that throughout my naval career G.I.s couldn't actually talk like other normal humans. They had to shout at everything or person.

The Butts consisted of a sloped area where we lay prone to fire our rifles at targets set# at intervals of 100 yards out to 400 yards in front of us was a small lake but at the very end of the range was an enormous wall which was to stop bullets hurtling out into the world. One of our merry bunch had absolutely no idea how to fire a rifle and managed to hit the top of the sixty foot wall on no less than three occasions and on the other two shattered wooden palings fifty feet in front of him. The gunnery boys were not happy. After three more clips being fired by this unfortunate with varying levels of success the head G.I. had had enough and proceeded to show just how easy it was to fire a .303 rifle. He hit every target every time. Every time that is until he started to show off just a wee bit when he sat on the ground crossed legged, put the rifle to his shoulder and held it one handed and fired at the target. For some reason known only to himself he fired too quickly – he pulled the trigger , the rifle fired, the butt jumped from his grasp hitting him smack on the side of his nose. We learned that day that G.I.'s did have real blood in their veins and not just iced water. After the laughter subsided the ensuing language was an education in itself.

One of the peculiarities of basic training is that everyone around you outranks you several times over and those with peaked caps are at the very least gods of varying degrees of seniority, therefore we were obliged to call everyone SIR and over the passage of some weeks this became so normal that even when ashore embarrassingly we called everyone that we met sir. Bus conductors wore uniforms and they too were given the "sir" treatment. What really made me wince was the day that I first went home on leave and actually called my father SIR!!! Yech!!

All military establishments have a predilection for inspections by all and sundry and every so often by the senior officer, H.M.S Raleigh was no different and" Captains' rounds" was announced. This entailed cleaning, scrubbing, polishing every possible surface before the inspecting officer and his entourage arrived. Thus one memorable Saturday morning we were put to work immediately after breakfast in cleaning our living quarters, loos had to be scrubbed from top to bottom and all of the coppers and brass fittings duly polished. Windows were cleaned and polished with newspaper. How this worked we none of us knew, but it did, and the glass gleamed brilliantly.

The mode of dress was No 8's over which we wore boiler suits, now I'm not one to complain but this was not an outfit suitable for wearing when engaged in heavy bursts of physical activity especially during late August. So by the end of two hours most of us were soaked with sweat.

One of the oddest pieces of equipment in use at the time for cleaning purposes was the BUMPER. This apparatus consisted of a heavy metal brush with a long handle that was hinged to move through 180 degrees. The object was to spread floor polish by hand then use this bumper in a push pull action to rub in the polish and also burnish the deck. Oddly enough it worked brilliantly. "Brown come 'ere" was screamed by our P.O. in charge, "go and report to the Petty Officer in charge of the armoury he's got a job for you". I handed over the trusty floor polishing bumper to another unfortunate and sped off to my new assignment.

God was waiting for me and as I arrived he screamed "where the hell have you been". I tried to explain that I'd only just been detailed off to assist but this carried absolutely no weight whatsoever – I was the lowest of the low." Clean it out" was the order" then when the captain arrives to inspect you are to report that it's ready for inspection". He departed and I was left to my own devices.

The armoury was in effect a large wooden hut with a 25 yard .22 rifle range in it. To the left as you entered this hut were several heavy duty racks all containing rifles secured by massive chains. Behind these racks were cabinet like safes bolted to the concrete floor containing the ammunition. I'm sure that this place had not been cleaned in years so I set to with gusto. Clouds of dust rose from my trusty broom thus covering all of the nicely oiled rifles in a film of dirty grey talc. Not to be deterred I opened all of the windows and the door and then threw several buckets of water around before brushing a river of black sludge from the floor out of the door and down the steps onto the path. I now had another problem, how to get the floor dry before rounds and also to wash down the path. Well I managed the path bit o.k. but had less success with the floor so I left it at that and polished off the rifles and generally dusted down everywhere, to my satisfaction anyway.

I stood back to admire my handiwork when another god appeared. "What the hell do you think you're doing, don't just stand around get back to your section and help out there." Trying to explain the situation in a calm and measured manner to these demigods did not seem to work so it was off to my section P.O. to report for further work.

"What are you doing 'ere, you're supposed to be standing rounds and they've started already". Explanations again were no good so it was off again on my travels. The armoury was some 200 yards from our hut so the dash back meant that I'd now covered effectively a lap of an athletics track wearing boots and full working kit so wasn't really up to presenting myself and the newly scrubbed armoury to the senior officer.

As I rounded the corner all that I could see before me was a huge array of peaked caps Gold badges of rank, gold braid on arms, medals by the gross all of which were attached to black uniforms. There was much muttering and grinding of teeth as I joined the back of the queue at the doorway of the armoury to see what was going on.

Years later I remember seeing a Norman Wisdom film where he was in a similar position, and it was at this point that all heads turned towards me. I have never seen so many eyes glaring at this wretch who benignly smiled back at them. There were big ones, round ones, slitted ones, all colours were represented most seemed to be bloodshot but they all had one thing in common – they were to an eyeball all staring at me..

So there I was looking in at them and they were all glaring at me when it dawned on me that there was something amiss. Now it is as well to remember that as I'd said earlier that anyone other than us was called sir and all were treated like gods, imagine what it was like for a young very raw recruit to be faced by a whole pack of gods. Terrifying doesn't even come close to describing my feelings as I was literally frogmarched away by 4 petty officers and one chief petty officer towards a block that had all the hallmarks of a prison. I was bundled through into a large office where behind a desk sat an even larger God who went by the name on his desk nameplate as "The Divisional Chief Petty Officer".

I was questioned over and over about why I'd left the armoury open and unattended and my explanation that a lesser god had screamed at me to go back to my mess was to no avail as I couldn't name him. Well how could I? they all looked the same to us lowly mortals.

I was asked all about the I.R.A. and what did I know of them. When my answer was in the negative they all surrounded me and shouted and yelled all asking different questions at the same time. I became a gibbering wreck in moments especially when I was marched (carried would probably cover it) out to be thrown before the biggest God of all so far – The Divisional Officer, a sub lieutenant no less. My time on this earth was I felt about to end as he said in a very sneaky way "Is your name really O'Brown and you're from Ireland"?

I related yet again the story of how I'd come to be away from the armoury after the detailing off by the lesser god. Was that the hint of a smile that I noticed or the beginning of a sneer on God's face moments before he announced that as I was so new to the service he didn't feel that a court martial was likely after all. It was at this point that the knees started to give way but I was saved the final ignominy by being dismissed and ordered to go back to the armoury to stand rounds and report to the Captain. As I left I heard harsh words being exchanged but didn't wait behind as I had another moment of peril and terror to undergo. Zeus and his entourage duly arrived. I reported to the captain, after having thrown up what I thought was a pretty darned good salute, that the armoury was ready for inspection. I had to follow him around just to await any criticism or questions that would be flung my way only to find that he was a most charming character who went on to say that I'd done a good job and that this was the cleanest he'd seen the armoury in months. I felt great because this was praise indeed. It was only the growl from one of the chiefs that my salute was beyond description and that I was to report to my P.O. for further action. No problem I thought I've just been to hell and back inside all of twenty minutes so what else could ever frighten me again. Time would answer that question several times over.

"Stupid Cupid" sung by Connie Francis was the big number one hit of the time. As part of the basic training we subjected to the worst of all plagues – Kit Muster – this was not for the feint hearted as what we were to do was lay out all of our kit on our beds in a totally prescribed layout. So on the day of the inspection we all dived into our naval ratings handbook (the bible to us all) and then tried to lay out all of our kit in an identical manner to the diagram. All clothing had to be of the same size and folded in the same place with your name quite clearly visible, even down to vest and pants, socks and lanyards.

Incidentally when we were first issued with our kit we were also armed with a wooden block name applicator. With this marvellous piece of apparatus we stamped our names in white paint on blue uniforms and equipment and black on white articles. Once dry this marking would never come off and this is exactly what their Lordships of the Admiralty wanted so that nobody else could ever be seen not wearing their own kit and to be caught was as bad as it could get. Stealing is what it was all about apparently, not that anyone ever did so far as I can recall.

I digress, the moment of the inspection came and went without too much of a problem except that two people had lost their enamel drinking mugs. So with much deft handling, replacements were passed up and down the line without the inspector realising or so we thought. Our P.O. had spotted our attempts at subterfuge and two unhappy souls were hauled off to purchase new kit after they had spent quite some time doing additional marching drill.

Getting back to uniforms and total mode of dress I would say that evidently my mother was quite distressed to receive my holdall containing all of my civilian clothing when it was returned home to her about 10 days after I'd signed on the dotted line. Naturally it hadn't occurred to me that there had been a problem it only becomes apparent when you are a parent I suppose.

One of the activities that we were soon to become accustomed to was that of laundry. There wasn't any. We had to wash all of our kit ourselves from No 8's right the way through to bed sheets and all by hand at that. No problem you might say and it's easy to overlook the fact that most of us were just out of school and mum had dealt with all that sort of thing in the past. Nonetheless we had to wash by hand using huge wash basins in the bath area and also had to take our turn at the dreaded porcelain. Once washed, drying was the next hazard and we hung our wet clothes everywhere. Hence it was useful to have our names quite clearly stamped on all pieces of clothing.

Some of the clothing was white and some blue, but every so often their Lordships had mixed the two colours together e.g. White tops and naval sailors collars (the ones with the three white lines sewn on). All very smart everyone remarked when they saw a sailor in full uniform. What the general public did not know was that the blue jean type dye would run unmercifully and was the devil's own job to remove from the white except by repeatedly rewashing those items. The blue from No 8's would run like mad as well so after the initial shock of turning out in a variegated uniform we finally got used to the idea of how to wash clothing on a regular basis.

Clean working uniforms had to be worn every Monday and Wednesday without fail. White tops washed as soon after use as possible. Socks and up's every day of course.

Having washed our kit and then dried the same our next hurdle was to then iron the blighters using the one and only iron per barrack block that was issued. Many a long hour waiting was endured by all but we survived and those of us who were a dab hand at the ironing lark could earn a few bob pressing other people's kit. The fees were normally settled in cigarettes, Yep we all to man smoked like chimneys and thought nothing of it. The No 8's were made of a heavy duty jean type of material and would crease dreadfully when you first started washing them and it would take anything up to three months to make them soft and pliable enough for ironing successfully.

Another ironing hazard was the best and second best blue serge uniforms and to make sure they had the correct number of creases in the trousers. The old wives tale was that you either had five creases representing the five oceans or seven to represent the seven seas. It was nothing to do with that at all; it depended on how tall you were. Just imagine someone who was six feet tall having only the five horizontal crease in his trouser legs, he'd look like a top heavy jack in the box.

One of the things that new recruits actually long for is to look like an old salt and what better way to achieve this than to sport a much washed blue jean collar (it actually takes years to achieve the correct result but we were not to know this) and so many wild and wacky ways were employed. One guy poured metal polish over one of his collars, rubbed it well and left it to stand. He bought his new collar two days later after having explained why to the training P.O. who was not in the slightest bit impressed – he-d seen it all before. Someone else thought that plunging his collar into a bucket filled with water and bleach was a much better idea – he bought his replacement two days later as well.

Really new recruits arrived some weeks after we'd been enrolled and boy did we feel superior to these green as grass land lubbers and almost expected them to call as sir as well. The arrogance of youth.

We quickly learned and took to the new language which several weeks earlier had been almost double Dutch. There were the Heads – the lavatory to land lubbers, slide was the practical name by which butter was known, Quarter deck, hands to dinner, going ashore, divisions, kye (hot chocolate drink), handsomely, two six heave – when hauling on a heavy rope and this call originated when the heavy guns on board ships of the line were moved by sheer muscle power. The list seemed endless but we took to it all including the use of the twenty four hour clock. Incidentally the end of the day is always 23.59 and the beginning of the new day being 0001- on reflection I think the Royal Navy actually owe me extra pay for the number of two minutes every day that didn't exist so far as they were concerned but I that worked through.

Moored in the river Tamar were two converted destroyers – Undine and Ursa are the names that spring to mind, and these were used at the time for training purposes particularly for stokers. This meant that some of our merry band of brothers actually went aboard real ships and were now considered to be almost real sailors by us lesser mortals. The prospective gunnery ratings were sent off on day courses to HMS Cambridge – a shore base but still somewhere else so again real sailors.

The day finally came that we were to be dispersed from basic training to our various speciality training establishments and this was when early friendships were immediately broken never to be rekindled. Funny thing with the navy was that you could serve one commission on a ship but when that was over there was every likelihood that you would never meet that or any members of that crew again. I can only remember one person in ten years of service that I came across after the initial draft and that was a radio operator called Piper. I met Piper on Ascension Island where 12 personnel in N.P1984 were drafted in 1963 and then again in 1966 when in Devonshire during our cruise to the Far East. He was as big a pratt on the second meeting as he was on the first.

This was also the day upon which we handed back the dreadful gaiters and khaki polish to the stores never to be seen again, as of course we were now going into an

environment where we would only need to wear shoes i.e. a wireless office. Bliss, absolute bliss we all said, having fully discussed the matter of boots and their effect n lino and carpets. We'd been released from purgatory.



Mercury

The messenger of the Gods, my Alma Mater

One of our merry band had from somewhere bought a radio operators badge and had shown this to one of our petty officers who immediately made him sew this on his uniform. After about half an hour our chum returned glowing with pride at the newly fitted badge correctly displayed on his right sleeve. About ten of us were sent off by train and bus to HMS Mercury, the naval signal school, situated at Leydene House in the heart of rural Hampshire, no chance of misdirecting any of her Majesties warships from here. So it was that we bade farewell to Raleigh and were now sailors of the world or so we tried to convince the lowly civilians that we encountered on the way. We loaded then unloaded and then reloaded all of our worldly possessions onto trucks, trains and the naval coaches provided by their lordships. It was some hours later that we arrived at the least military looking location you could imagine and it was almost at the moment that we set foot on the tarmac outside the officer of the day's office that a rather crestfallen young trainee radio operator was told in no uncertain terms that he had to earn the right to wear a badge of any sort and to remove it as of that moment. The R.O.3 badge was torn from his arm.

We were checked in and carried out the joining routine which meant that you visited every known department on the establishment and had the joining list stamped by everyone in charge. One person we had to report to was the Chief G.I. who was in charge of the armoury, parades and inspections and anything considered military. He was also in charge of handing out Gaiters to new trainees along with a tin of khaki polish to each and every one. No, No, No

we thought as a man Life's not fair sometimes when all of your hopes and illusions are shattered.

Our new quarters were old, squat breezeblock buildings with corrugated asbestos roofs and had seen much better days. The floors were all concrete and so during the winter were constantly cold especially as our heating system was – huge pot bellied stoves two to a barrack room. The problem was that you either boiled when close to or froze when about six feet away which didn't help when trying to catch up on the day's instruction and carry out your own form of extra study.

On day one of our induction into the finest branch of the Royal Navy we were introduced to a whole bunch of new words like Biffers, the phonetic alphabet, MTX, MSX, and so on. The list seemed endless. My entry into the world of naval communications was when the Morse code was still king and formed the backbone of worldwide communications. It soon became apparent that my ability to understand the code was somewhat limited and regularly only managed to achieve 70% when 90% was considered to be just about reasonable. At the end of ten weeks of training I was advised by the instructor that if there wasn't a significant improvement I would be re-categorised into another branch of the navy. The thought of re-cattng as it was known was not on my list of must do's, can you honestly see me as a Gunner or a stoker?

At this stage of our training we were trying to read Morse at the speed of 10 words per minute when we were told that it was to be upped to 12 wpm (this I think was to weed out those who were not so strong). The Morse code lessons were all conducted by the use of a tape head and a perforated paper tape which would send out Morse symbols at a prescribed rate forever until changed or the paper tape disintegrated.

There were groans all round as the tape was played for some twenty minutes and we all sweated trying to keep up with the incredible speed and pace of marking the same and then giving the results to our instructor. "Is this a joke" said the man in charge "has Brown been cheating?" I'd managed to get 94% that day and throughout my naval service never ever fell below 98% in other words I had two character errors in one hundred sent. It turned out that the reason that I'd failed miserably up to that point was that the transmitted speed was too slow for me to comprehend and I was writing down individual dots and dashes e.g. dash means T and dot means E. I only came into my own as the speed increased. By the time I graduated from Mercury I was expected to and did achieve 25 wpm all of the time.

Mercury was made up of the very old and the very new and ranging from black painted WW II Nissan huts through breeze block and asbestos roofed classrooms to the brand new living accommodation houses on the crescent. Leydene House itself was a magnificent building which has now unfortunately been sold off as luxury flats.

As an aside Liz and I were out just cruising around the Hampshire countryside where after having taken a wrong turning ended up in Mercury only to see massive building destruction taking place. Not daunted by this we drove through on the public road around to the main house and parked where it said for sale. In I went to be met by two young lovelies sat behind a desk who beamed and asked whether or not I'd like a guided tour round the old house as it was now being sold off in luxury apartments. I managed to talk my way in saying that I just wanted to have one last look at the old place and managed to get the sympathy vote from them both so they let me wander around on my own.

I must admit that it was sad to see the old place with the most magnificent stairway just coming under the heading of luxury apartments and with the dreaded estate agent types just sitting there knowing nothing of the history, the ghosts, the tears and the fun. All they wanted was their commission and then they would be on their way to desecrate another site of outstanding beauty.

It was as I was trying to prise off the sign on one of the doors that they returned to see what I was doing. Caught in the act it would seem (story of my life). Used the sympathy card yet again and they helped me find a screw driver so that the gold lettered sign was carefully removed from the door and placed quite securely in the inside pocket of my jacket. Should anyone who visits my house want to use the toilet they are ushered towards the door with a sign on it announcing to all "Wardroom Library". I must admit it's rather nice to say to a guest that the Loo is in the library. It has a nice ring to it. A little bit of naval history was saved.

An odd point is that Mercury had been built on either side of a public highway with no particular part of it, except the classrooms, being in any way secure from the public. Every terrorist, madman, murderer or nut could have walked in to any part of the place and had three meals per day without any form of check up. The consequence of this was that the trainees had to stand a walking security patrol from 22.00 through to 06.00. Every night and for two hours at a time ONE (yes just one) poor unfortunate in full naval uniform had to report to the Officer of the Watch – well the quartermaster really and pick out of a box a card which gave a precise route to patrol and check doors, gates, windows and any other entry points. Having finished that route it was back to the OOW office to pick at random another route to patrol and so on. Sometimes after the shuffle of cards had taken place you could end up going out on the same route as the one you had just finished. They thought that this was sneaky enough to foil any would be intruder!

One thing that always baffled me was that we all wore hob nailed boots which made it absolutely impossible to walk anywhere stealthily and during the wee small hours of the morning the noise was deafening. Any crook/spy worth his salt would have long since moved away from the patrol area as we approached and moved back in as soon as we had passed by. Nevertheless to protect the signal school we were armed with a torch - war department pattern, khaki, bent in the middle – and when I was on patrol always seemed to have knackered batteries, and the best of all a half pick axe handle for protection. No formal training in the art of self defence was ever given during my stay at Mercury, nor the whole of my naval career, so what the hell we would have done if confronted by an intruder none of us ever knew.

There was only one patrol area that none of us liked and this was out through the main gate, where incidentally, an armed guard was on duty, and out on to the pitch black through road. It wasn't the darkness so much that worried us it was more the field next to road which was used on occasion by livestock. Now livestock and in particular cows don't eat at night they sleep like the rest of us except that they could hear the hob nailed boots of the naval hero coming from miles away and were awake and ready for you. I can tell you that at 03.00 when you are still half asleep a cow approximately five feet away letting go with an almighty bellow scares the c**p out of you in no uncertain terms and many a patrol has been seen to break the Olympic hundred meters time by a long way.

One last point on the night patrol was that in the year that I was training at Mercury and was unfortunate enough to draw this duty – the bods in the OOW office never once offered you a cup of tea, not once enquired whether you were hot, cold or indifferent as they sat in front of a very warming fire. Still as trainees were told to expect the worst of everything that the navy could throw at us, and no doubt they did so whenever possible. To finish with the matter of these duties was that we all pulled the bad duties as well as the good ones so nobody really moaned too much, except that every one hated, yes hated, the dreaded Wardroom galley duty. On the day that you pulled this bad card you were expected eat your evening meal, complete whatever revision or extra study you had been given before presenting yourself at 18.30 to the cooks in charge of the wardroom galley ready to start the washing up by hand of all of the crockery, cooking pot and pans and cutlery that the officers had used during their meal which went on until 19.30. This meant that by the time that all had been washed and dried and then stored and all of the galley scrubbed down, you were lucky to get away much before 20.45. Just in time for a shower before turning in and lights out at 22.00.

The only other duty that was memorable was that of the ever fit FIRE PARTY. This Particular activity was probably the most laughable and idiotic waste of man power that our lords and masters could ever have dreamt of. No, I think I can say that the whole idea of eight ratings hauling a one ton fire fighters pump around a campus at odd hours of the day and night could only have been conceived after or during a particularly drunken dinner in the wardroom. We had to haul this monster around to any site that the OOD thought was particularly difficult to reach and then play at being fire fighters to put out in 99% of the time imaginary conflagrations. What was so stupid was the fact that the civil fire brigade would have to be called out in the case of an emergency in any event. No chance that the fire in hand would be left to a bunch of comedians like trainee communicators that's for sure. I believe that one fire crew actually emptied the gold fish pond in a fit of over enthusiasm.

The duty fire party had to all sleep in the same quarters for the duration of their watch and to this day I can only ever remember sleeping in the cell block at the main gate. This in itself could be a bit of a problem especially if the cells were actually occupied by those who'd been caught committing some misdemeanour. The problem was that the person in cells stayed where they were and we had to make what other arrangements we could in order that we could at least have some chance of a nights' sleep (unless called out for exercise or for real). The inmates had a more comfortable nights' sleep than us – is it me????

Apparently our training class was becoming quite notorious for somewhat boisterous behaviour although we thought that we had just had a light hearted approach to each and everything. Having said that we all tried our damndest at everything from class work to sport and to come second wasn't in our vocabulary. Unfortunately some of the instructors took a dim view of some of our antics and we became the fittest radio operators in the navy judging by the number of times that we were marched out to the main road, where there was hill, and made to run up and down this for anything up to twenty minutes at a time. Spirits were never dampened no matter what punishment was meted out. I did hear sometime later that our course marks were some of the highest that had been reached by any class before us so we weren't that bad a bunch really.

Part way through our training a recruiting Chief Petty Officer turned up to give us a lecture on the secret navy – The Electronic Warfare department – and only gave just enough information to whet your appetite and to leave you wanting more. This guy showed a

schematic drawing of a ship with line drawings depicting all of the compartments including those that would apply to the EW department quite clearly marked in bright red. They were called Cookie and Porker but later we were to know them as the UA8/9. At this point my Walter Mitty personality kicked in and I transferred over to continue my training with this new department. What I hadn't realised was that I still had to achieve full pass marks in the normal radio operators section as well as become fully trained in the art of eavesdropping and radar detection.

The E.W. department was all very hush- hush and I found out later that some of the ordinary general radio operators didn't think much of us as we were thought of as spies against them and this manifested itself sometimes with outright hostilities only being just avoided. What it meant for us in this branch was that we had to be as good if not better than most others in the communications branch just to achieve a small amount of credit for what we did.

Fortunately I can say that I did manage to out achieve many or most competition both within my own branch and that of the general radio operators. In other words I was damned good at my job and didn't come second to anybody – big words you might say but, I mean every one of them. More of this later.

We were taught a whole new procedure for intercommunication between ships both by voice and the Morse code and as this was battle signals the coding was small and self evident. Added to this we also had the job of using HF/DF equipment (the mighty FH4 aerial located on the very top of the mast) to locate the general directions of enemy transmissions (this was + or – 5degrees), read the transmission at the same time as passing this information firstly to all other ships in convoy and then notify our own operations room so that they might log this on to the radar charts.

The second piece of equipment that was fitted to our ships was the radar direction finder – UA3, and again this gave an accuracy of + or – 5 Degrees. The training for this was somewhat more complicated in that we were now expected to learn and detect the sound of a radar beam as it located you. There were so many types of radar around that we were given a general training and then armed with a huge encyclopaedic tome that gave the fullest details of all the worlds radars including those fitted to warships, aircraft, submarines and even military shore based equipment. As with everything else in life the more we used the equipment the better we became at the detection game, this meant that we (the ship) had a better chance of detecting the enemy earlier and thus giving it a better chance to attack or defend itself if necessary. The only serious drawback with the UA3 was that it apart from detecting radars far away it also had the habit of picking up your own radar emissions and thus blotting out the very capability it was supposed to have. So apart from the dreadful noise that was made by radars it was an easy piece of equipment to use.

One of the functions of the E.W. department was that of the interception of enemy and foreign military Morse code transmissions log them and then send them off to military intelligence for decoding and dissemination to the appropriate authority but more of this later.

These days the EW department is known as the “Gollies“ and the personnel are almost all from the seaman branch - in other words my EW was high powered Communications intercept and signal transmission whereas now it is only the Interception of Radar emissions and all controlled and analysed by computers.

We were known as the “Sandeman” outfit – as per the port/sherry of the same name. The sign that was stencilled on all of the E.W. office doors was that of the masked crusader dressed in black on the Sandeman port bottles. We did attempt the Zoro theme at one stage but it was considered just a bit OTT, really in your face stuff.

My time at Mercury was better than enjoyable and I must admit I had the wildest time that could be imagined with some of the nuttiest recruits that you could hope to meet. WE drank too much and took on the world of the WRNS by storm. I know that all sailors brag of their prowess with the ladies and of the pursuit of the same but we did pursue and did catch a damned good percentage of the same to the enjoyment of all parties. One thing I must say was that we worked hard all of the time and I don't regret one minute of my time there.

The WRNS were billeted at a place called Soberton Towers in the Meon valley which was some little distance from us – probably by design rather than just the geography, and it was here that we would gravitate to on a bus supplied by the navy or if you were really lucky you had a mate who had his own transport. The real point of contact was the most delightful of local pubs that anyone could find anywhere – The Pinky as it was named was but two minutes walk from the WRNS quarters, or about an hour per grope, if you were lucky many a virgin was converted there or thereabouts. Having said all of that we were all youngsters and enjoyed the company of our friends and associates of both sexes (there's that word again, the one that got us all into trouble at some stage). The best way to describe it was that we were happy.

Today that pub is still there and known by its original and proper name of The White Lion and is a great meeting place for locals and dedicated walkers.

I remember being in my first vehicle crash when coming back from a night of proposed debauchery at the Pinky. My chum at the time was the proud owner of a Ford Thames 500 cwt van and we were on our way back driving through a snow storm – it can get just a bit on the cold side in that part of Hampshire – and we were sliding slowly around a bend only to meet a Southdown bus sliding the other way. The result of this slippery slide was that both vehicles met in the middle of the road, bounced and then careered off of each others' way. Neither vehicle stopped to assess the damage which turned out to be quite superficial in the end. My mates name was Thompson – something spooky about that as later chapters will tell.

One of the exercises that all military personnel will remember is the monthly parade in best bib and tucker – to the Navy this was always referred to as DIVISIONS – on this day, which was usually a Friday, the whole of the ships company was expected to fall in front of Leydene House (Mercury didn't have a proper parade ground like some of the pucker establishments) to be inspected by the senior officer.

Every uniform part had to be just spot on in every respect namely that white front had to be virginal white. Creases in trousers had to be spot on, shoes highly polished and bows tied correctly. Yes I did say bows. One of the pieces of equipment that all sailors on the lower deck had to endure was the bow on the front of his uniform and that of his cap tally. The bow on the uniform front is to keep the black silk in place and is to secure the lanyard around. Easy you might think until the point comes when you have to tie a bow upside down so that it looks the right way up when viewed from the front. Somehow we all managed to turn out

properly all of the time but some of the less fortunate in some of the other classes were constantly being put on report and having to endure the dreaded kit muster.

Once the inspection was over each class then marched off to the tunes selected by the bandmaster, past the captain who took the salute whilst standing on his podium in front of the main mast and the ships wheel from the Prince Regent. As soon as we were out of sight we halted and were then dismissed ready for our weekend either on duty or off ashore.

Weekends off were one long weekend per month from Friday afternoon until 0700 on the following Monday. There were a further two short weekends which started at 12.00 on the Saturday until the Monday as before mentioned. What this actually meant was that every Saturday morning it was mess cleaning and inspection by divisional officers before being released to do exactly as you pleased. There was always a bus service laid on by the Navy and this took jolly Jack Tar into Portsmouth for him (or her as there were of course the WRNS) to sample the fleshpots of the NAAFI or any other establishment that wanted to relieve you of your hard won cash.

One of the least remembered of the fleshpots was an old pub called “The Balmoral” needless to say this was roundly changed to be named “The Immoral” but not because of anything downright sleazy. This was the only pub that served draft Scrumpy in all its various forms. The cost for one pint of this elixir of life was precisely one shilling, or in today’s money – 5p !!!!! Not bad considering that probably three pints of the stuff would make you brain dead, two pints had the unfortunate ability to take away all feeling in your legs but one pint was enough for you to take on the world and all that it had to offer. The cost of this brew was wonderful or so we thought as our money used to run out during the week before we were due to be paid so this would extend our spending power enormously.

One evening two of us entered the Immoral for the first time and ordered just a half pint each just to test the situation out. Well the first sip was at best disgusting and the second no better so that after half an hour we still hadn’t managed to drink even half of our glass. As we stood there at the bar watching the antics of those who had been imbibing for some time we noticed two rather good looking girls as they entered. We straightened up and discussed our plan of action and who was going to chat up whom and as we did so the two lovelies walked to the bar and ordered their drinks. “Hi Fred, two pints of old Vesuvius (actual name not recalled) my dear” they said with all the confidence in the world and then proceeded to dispatch the same within five minutes of being served. Our two goddesses then took their leave we felt that God had let us off lightly that night as we finally drank the remainder of our half pints and we left for the more urbane NAAFI club that was just around the corner.

Funny thing about the Navy was that we were then the only service that was still paid in cash, I think their Lordships couldn’t countenance that Jolly Jack could possibly have a bank account. The other anomaly was that we were paid once per fortnight whilst the other services received their money on a monthly basis.

The pay parade was on reflection downright degrading and a throwback to the 19th century as we had to assemble in the main block (Eagle Block) and whilst standing in line the Master at Arms would wander up and down detailing people off to have their hair cut or by a new piece of equipment and so on. Having run the gauntlet we individually marched up to a desk, behind which sat a paymaster, a Jack Dusty and an invigilating officer, called out our official number at the same time we removed our caps and proffered these to the man with

the money. Having satisfied himself that you were who you said you were then notes and coins were deposited on the top of your cap together with cigarette coupons. You then marched off and the next poor lowly sole went through the same procedure.

The cigarette coupons were as good as money if you were a non smoker as these could be sold for 10/- on what was the black market and usually purchased from you by senior rates. The coupons bought you 600 Blue Liner cigarettes per month at 5p per pack of twenty. Blue Liners were so called because they had a blue line over the whole length of the cigarette and so very recognisable from any others on the open market. There were two manufacturers of these ciggies – BAT and S and Co. the most sought after of which were the later as they had a better taste and they were produced by Sobrani & Co

The downside of this other than what we now know to be the obvious was that we were only allowed to take with us one pack per day if going ashore, so when inspection took place at the main gate you would be surprised as to where ingenious jolly jack tar had tried to hide his extra rations. Funnily enough I didn't see one person get caught out in all the time that I was in the service.

Getting back to Divisions, there was one particular day when we were waiting to march off and the class ahead of us marched passed and as it did so a trouser leg of one of the blokes suddenly came away just above the knee. This was followed shortly thereafter with the remaining leg detaching itself and this all happened within feet of the Captain, Commander, Divisional Officers of all departments and worse than that the glittering eyes of the Chief Gunnery Instructor who was by this time turning a very fetching shade of purple. The Chief G.I. was not a happy man bearing in mind his high blood pressure and that this was all happening on HIS parade (G.I.'s think like that). The loss of the trouser legs caused the whole of the parade to fall into total disarray and we were soon let off as quickly as they could get rid of us.

What happened to the poor unfortunate was quite extraordinary – he was let off as it turned out that this lad had been told by some old stripy (long serving low rank sailor) that if you were to put soft soap into the creases in your trousers and then ironed them that you would achieve a spectacular result. This was in some ways true except that this lad was ironing his uniform at least twice per week and had actually made the blue serge material brittle. As he had been looking after his kit so well, or so he thought, he was given a clean sheet and only had to purchase, immediately, new trousers from slops. Slops is a very old naval term for the storage of all clothing used by the onboard crew and is not a free issue department.

Eventually we as a class were all moved from the basic Nissan huts into brand new accommodation blocks that looked more like houses than anything military all of which were named after famous admirals of yesteryear. My happy sponsor was Admiral Pascoe, I'm sure he turned in his grave at the sight of us and the antics that we got up to. This new found living was incredible as at long last we had smaller rooms that housed just eight and even more interesting was that we now had central heating. Gone was the pot bellied stove, smoke and collecting wood and coal each day. Now we could luxuriate in evenly shared out heat with the exception of the two nearest the door who in the wintertime were given a mighty Arctic blast every time the door was opened. We were still subjected to the nightly call over the Tannoy of "Pipe down" which meant that it was time to head for the bed and lights were to

be put out. The duty P.O. normally came round to make sure that we did just that, but they never seemed to be happy people for some reason.

One night there was quite a kaffuffle in the hallway and the door to our mess was thrown open and there standing before us was an apparition dressed in pyjamas boots and gaiters, wearing his raincoat. This ensemble was topped off by the wearing of a gas mask and navy hat. The creature was attended by one of the duty CPO's who then gave our man a prod and he stepped forward to announce –

“The Chief does have a mother and father who are still alive and happily married. He is not a Bastard after all “.

This said our man about turned and was marched off to the next mess to perform all over again. Sometime later the miscreant was heard and seen doing a double march up and down the roadway outside our block, still wearing all of his mixed kit but this time he was holding his mattress over his head. We think he lasted a quarter of an hour before exhaustion took over and he was dragged back to his bed. How he coped with breathing is a mystery as we could hardly hear him when he'd given his speech regarding the C.P.O.

Funny, yes but cruel as well.

The days marched on as we were introduced into the mysteries of Naval Codes, transmitters and how to tune them, message procedure, voice procedure, the Morse code, radar characteristics, how to touch type at 40 wpm. At that time we as a branch had to be aware of communications in all of its forms whereas the other two arms of the military had individuals to handle each subject. The reason being of course - there's only so much space on a ship so we had to be the master of all at the end of nearly a years' hard work the time came for us newly qualified radio operators to be drafted to our new ships whether real or shore establishments and it also meant the passing of the ways for us all. Some guys I never met again throughout my naval service, mainly because at that time the country operated a large international force covering just about everywhere on the globe.

For some reason I had when asked earlier said that I would like to go to the Far East Station and as luck would have it I actually got my first choice. I was drafted to HMS Cardigan Bay based in Singapore.

As I was to go too far flung places the next Part of the agenda was – JABS – needle point with attitude best describes the number of harpoons that were thrown into both of my arms. Of them all TABS were the worst because in those days we were injected with a certain percentage and then had to return days later for the balance. It was the balance that dealt the killer blow because it made your arm swell to about twice its normal size and then it was agony if anyone brushed against you. This I can verify as on the first night after the jab itself several of us went to the movies on base and all of us sat with a one chair space between us to avoid any form of contact. This worked well until my mate threw out his arm at a funny scene in the film, it hit me smack on the arm, I passed out and to this day don't know how the film ended. The point of this is that by the time I was released on my 14 days embarkation leave I'd received something like seven jabs in a two day period. The last that I remembered was arriving at my mothers' house saying hello and then passing out. I came round some ten days later, one stone lighter having suffered from a mild bout of Yellow fever, Typhoid and one or two other unmentionable diseases according to the family doctor. By the time that I'd

recovered my leave was over and I was then on my way back to Mercury to start part three of my life as a “SPARKER” as we were known in the Royal Navy.

The People

On thinking back the personalities that were about were so many and various that it is hard to remember them other than with total fascination. In my class alone there were two ex fishermen from Hull who'd suddenly become disillusioned with life on the rolling deep catching fish, staying in harbour for a week and then setting off for another stint so decided that the Royal Navy was for them. One thing that I remember vividly about these two guys was that they liked tattoos and would every so often after pay day set off for Portsmouth and have another picture indelibly marked on a portion of their bodies forever. They did tell me that when they had been earning a lot of money as deep sea fishermen that they would just buy a brand new suit, wear it for the week that they were on shore and then wear the same as working clothes on their next trip out to sea. They must have spent a fortune over the years but on the other hand they had been happy souls.

Every class had its follower and ours was no different and this came in the shape of a lad from Devon who'd been brought up on a farm and for some reason he'd joined the navy. This lad was ever so easily influenced so he charged off on pay day with our two worthies from Hull to get his tattoo. He had pictures of ladies in pirate's gear on his legs and others on his arms – he was now a REAL sailor. I heard that some two years later that he'd been invalided out as he couldn't cope with having the tattoos on his body and it had finally dawned upon him that they were to be there for the duration. Whilst at Mercury we saw the last intake of national servicemen to the Royal Navy communications department. None of the NS communicators were ever trained as sparkers they had a branch called Coders and that is generally what they were engaged to carry out – coding and decoding encrypted signals and so once their training was over we were never to see them again as they were drafted to shore establishments and we to sea.

Two of this happy band were named Cater and were identical twins. The most notable of the NS was a young chap called John Howard Davies who, at the time, was totally unknown to any of us. Unknown that is until he told us of his earlier exploits as a child film star. He was the 1948 Oliver, the one with the little golden haired lad asking for more. He was also I believe Tom Brown in “Tom Browns Schooldays” and latterly I've since noticed as the producer of the “Goodies” on TV.

Young Davies always had a string of the most gorgeous girlfriends at whom we could only stand and drool. Having said that he never became a show off nor did he parade his popularity in front of us he was just a nice easy going sort of mate in the mess.

Saunders was a mate of mine throughout training and a more unlikely bloke to sign up for the navy you would be hard pressed to find. He was about 6 feet tall and as skinny as a rake so much so that because he had the thinnest legs I've ever seen he could almost put on his gaiters without even undoing them first.

Now Saunders came from somewhere in Kent and had a pretty good upbringing- very middle class and very staid – but he had one passion. Classic motorcars. One day he returned from a long weekend driving a bright blue SS Jaguar 1933 (or 1936 I'm not that sure), open top and big frog eye headlamps with chrome everywhere. It was an absolute dream and now would cost a fortune. He doted on this car but loved to go out and around Hampshire.

One day I was given the great privilege of accompanying him for a bash out to The Pinky so resplendent in our civilian clothes and both of us sporting tweed cheese cutter caps we set off. On arrival at the main gate the leading hand of the guard was seen to dash out resplendent in full uniform come to attention and give us the most magnificent salute with his rifle and bayonet. We saluted back and drove off down the road howling with laughter. It was upon our return that matters took a much more ugly tone. The L/hand of the guard hadn't been awfully impressed when he found out that two OD's had taken the piss. We were marked men after that escapade and found out that if we were drawn into any duty that the L/Hand was in charge of, we really got the short end. Still it was funny at the time.

Another of the weird people we had as a raw recruit was a Maltese lad by the name of Melia who always sounded like an Italian gangster from a B class movie. Now Melia had one fear in life, one that would send him into near hysterics, one that would leave him a shaking wreck on his bed if cornered. Melia hated false teeth. Why ??? you may ask, none of us knew the answer but we all enjoyed Melia bating especially when all seemed too quiet. All we needed was to borrow a set of false teeth from one of the class and then the chase was on.

Actually this sort of thing didn't happen too often bearing in mind that we were all under training and had, believe it or not, homework as well as all of the normal guard and cleaning duties to perform as well as keeping our kit up to date and chasing after the opposite sex in the form of the trainee WRNS.

It was announced one fine morning that our class – LS13 – had been selected, Awarded, picked out call it what you will to be the major part of the honour guard on Trafalgar Day. Now apart from total dismay at having been singled out it dawned on us finally that this was indeed the big honour as of course Nelson was our God and this was his day (and ours I might add) .The officer who'd announced it to us that we were to be part of the guard on Southsea Common had actually said to us that it was to be on "Trafalgar Day".

There were as you can imagine a lot of blank faces around – now Trafalgar Day we had all heard of. The first one – nuh!!!! Sub Lieutenant Drummond was the man in charge and he was a man who was going to be so proud of being the officer I/C of this part of the parade. We were marched and drilled and countermarched until everything seemed to bleed including our eyelashes but we were somehow moulded into a fairly cohesive bunch. On the day of the grand meeting we were all assembled in our best uniforms and inspected and moaned at by the Chief GI and then ushered onto the awaiting buses to be taken to Southsea common. It was here that things started to go a bit off kilter in that none of us had marched on grass before and therefore when we set off we couldn't hear the sound of our own feet and so we lost a lot of the rhythm of marching. As a long black crocodile we careered along until finally stopped to take up our position in front of three 25 pound guns. "When the pongos fire their guns I don't want to see any movement from you lot" muttered Bulldog Drummond, and so we waited for the celebration to proceed.

At the point when the first shot was fired we could hear the commands being given by the bod in charge of the cannons. He yelled FIRE. The gun went bang Bulldog must have jumped at least a foot in the air only to land and nearly dropped is sword. What was so unreal was that he did this every time that the guns fired. Now if you are a pongo or a blue job movements are not so easy to detect, the Navy on the other hand always have a problem in that their uniforms are black and all of the webbing and associated military bits are pure, blazing WHITE and any movement can be seen for miles. Bulldog managed to light up Southsea common with his movements. Alas the bloke died not so long after in a climbing accident in the highlands of Scotland and he was sorely missed by the communications branch.



HMS Cardigan Bay

The assembly point for the crew of HMS Cardigan Bay was I believe at Hendon, why is still beyond me, but suffice it to say the whole experience was a complete mystery to me. The main mess hall was a total disgrace, there were tables encrusted with spilt food, plates and used cutlery littered the place and the floor was like a skating rink. All of this to men in the Royal Navy was totally alien as we were trained to be meticulously clean and tidy in every aspect of our daily lives within the service I think that this was the air trooping centre for all three services and nobody seemed to care as to what was happening let alone clean the place up.



Up to this point in my life I had never been outside of the country let alone aboard a plane bound for places I'd only read about in geography books or heard of from those souls who came back to Mercury from far flung places. It was always quite funny to see the returnees during the winter months as they came back with magnificent sun tans and the WRNS drooled over them especially as they wore their white tops and not the ubiquitous blue woollen jumpers that the rest of us had to wear. Now everyone returning from holidays will wear a light coloured top to show off their tans whenever possible.

Just to digress, the woollen jumpers that I've mentioned were heavy duty close weave bits of apparel and always had to be worn underneath the No8 shirts and your only protection from permanent itching was to wear a singlet vest under that. One thing that was totally forbidden was the T shirt. The other point about this jumper (and we were issued with 2) was that after you'd been wearing next to your skin all day it had to be washed. Sometimes the drying rooms got so full up with laundry that it was almost impossible to dry of your clothes properly. Even only slightly damp jumpers are not good. They smell, they itch and until they've been washed a few times would leak colour so much so that ancient Brits would have been happy with the woad colouration.

One thing sticks out in my memory is that the aeroplane was Bristol Britannia known throughout the world as – The Whispering Giant - and the air trooping company was called Hunting Clan who for a short period of time had the sole rights to troop movements.

My memory of the details of the flight are almost nonexistent, except that we landed in Istanbul and that there was snow everywhere. We stayed at the airport for some two hours when all that we could do was sit around in the main lounge and drink. It was hard but someone had to do it. An Air France (Caravelle) jet took off and only remembered because it was one of the smallest passenger jets around. Finally some 23 hours after takeoff (Britannia's only fly at about 250 mph so getting anywhere in world travel distances takes a long, long time) we finally landed at Paya Lebah airport on Singapore Island. The heat, the humidity and the smells were the first things to take us all by surprise and stick in the memory to this day, as PL was actually a swamp area and as things turned out was the subject of much debate at ministerial level some years later.

The one smell that I can recall to this day was that of sweet, burned sugar and vegetation so much so that we could actually pick up the smell when still some 20 – 30 miles offshore. Again the journey from the airport to the naval base at HMS Terror is still a complete blank.

HMS Terror was the main naval establishment on Singapore Island and was massive. The one thing that remains in my memory to this day was the size of the accommodation blocks which were all three stories tall and built in the grand colonial style the British were famous for throughout the world. . Each mess had huge windows (no glass, just slatted shutters) and the ceilings seemed as high as a semi detached house with the obligatory two fans to move the air around as much as possible. No namby pamby air conditioning for us old salts in fact it was from that date onwards and my stay in Singapore that perspiration took over on a grand scale. The humidity was so high that combined with the temperature humans didn't stand much chance of a "dry" day. This meant that showers and copious quantities of Foo Foo were the order of the day. What's Foo Foo?? Well it simply is the sound of highly scented talcum powder being shaken out of the tin.

The experience of HMS Terror was quite unusual in that we were just detailed off to sleep in the first mess that we came to and so all branches were totally mixed up for what was probably the last time ever. Stokers messed with electricians, seamen gunners with the communications ratings and so on. It was here that we were to stay for the next three days with absolutely nothing to do but just enjoy ourselves and being sailors of the first order that is exactly what we did. It was off to the Olympic sized swimming pool for most of the day where we could start the acclimatization process by mingling with anyone. As this was one of the last outposts of the British Empire remaining we did only associate with the whites of course, the Malays and Chinese were mess boys and servants who would bring to us drinks when we wanted them. Pompous little buggers weren't we?

All of our kit had arrived and so much unpacking took place purely and simply to find our tropical uniforms – shorts beloved shorts were the order of the day and we then became easy to spot as newcomers. White legs were the big give away, but these soon turned to various shades of pink through to lobster red as each day passed. The other piece of kit that we had just been issued with was naval issue sandals. These items of footwear were the ugliest sandals that you could imagine and being made out of pure leather were also the most dangerous until they'd been suitably worn-in as you could slip on almost any surface until the soles were well and truly roughed up.

The odd thing for us to get used to after the normal rigours of service life in barracks in England was Tropical routine. This mode of operation meant that all work started at eight o'clock in the morning but finished abruptly for the day at one o'clock after which the time was all your own to squander at will. Some slept, some swam others played sport whilst others just sat around talking. Oh what a hectic life we led.

On day two an odd event occurred – Hammocks and all of the accoutrements arrived – there were two hammocks allocated to each man together with the following:-

- (A) One horsehair mattress
- (B) Two sets of nettles (ropes to hang the hammock up with)
- (C) One set of irons to convert the hammock into a camp bed.
- (D) Two blankets and a pillow

Now for those of us who never even seen a hammock let alone been given two of the beasts, this whole process was just a bit daunting in that we had to join all of the components together to make a safe, reliable and comfortable sleeping instrument. Easy? Not so as we didn't even know how to tie the nettles to the canvas hammock.

As mentioned the nettles are the bits of rope that are attached to a steel ring which is in turn attached a rope of some strength and is the means by which you attach your bed to a hook or any other sticky outy bit on board a ship.

Each one of the nettles is tied through a metal eye situated at each end of the flat piece of canvass known as the hammock. We, the new arrivals and being the youngest of the new crew fairly sprinted through this exercise and had finished whilst some of the older hands were still plodding on. Smug looks between us until we tried to sling the hammock and then

try to get into the damned things. We hadn't realised that the nettles are longest in the middle section and shortest at the top and outside section which would have thus provided us with a perfect tube into which was placed the horsehair mattress, sheets and blankets. Ah! The impetuosity of youth.

Getting on board the ship was a whole new experience for me and my chums as we hadn't even been near a warship let alone stepped aboard one. There were passage ways, straight up and down ladders, hatch coamings to step over, ordinary sets of stairs, doors that had huge locking handles to negotiate whilst all of the time carrying kitbags, cases and of course the hammocks.

My first impression of this warship (HMS Cardigan Bay) was WOW look at me mum I'm now a real sailor and this is the mighty war machine to which I've been sent. The smells were all different from anything that I'd experienced before – there was fuel oil, cooking from the main galley, well scrubbed decks below, re circulated air through the main air ducts (commonly known as fan trunking) and people, lots of people in very small spaces which as to become home and of course there was the smell of FFO, albeit in small amounts but there nonetheless. The passageways got smaller and the ladders steeper the further into the ship that progressed until finally the moment of arrival at the furthest point forward that anyone could go before hitting one of the two bow anchors. Into the space allotted which was approximately 12 feet by 18 feet were to eat, sleep and generally live twenty two souls of various shapes and sizes. I spotted an area that nobody else had noticed and lunged forward to sling my hammock. A brave move on my behalf as of course I was but a very lowly class of radio operator, in fact there were two of us who earned titles that could not be repeated in polite society, and had no hierarchical standing whatsoever. It was not until 23.45 and 03.45 that I was to discover why I had found such an easy spot to sling my hammock – it was in the main passageway and at the change of the night watches that firstly the rating wakening the relief staff came into the mess to shake the hands and managed to bang their heads on the bottom of my pit and then when everyone was leaving they did the same and then the people coming off watch would do the same again. I managed to sleep in four hour stints only for several weeks until exhaustion took over and I could sleep through anything and can to this day.

The pecking order for who slept where and who sat where and at which table, was quite complicated in that leading hands had the first pick and they took the only 2 bunks that were available. Next came the next highest ranking sailor by promotion and qualification and time served in the navy but this could be overturned by an old stripy (usually a rating who either hadn't progressed or been promoted other than as an able seaman but had served longer than eight years but normally twelve and had three stripes on his left arm to prove it). The stripes were awarded to each sailor at one for every four years of good conduct – or undetected crime was the more usual way of looking at it – and actually had a monetary value so that if you were in serious poo one or all of your stripes could be taken away from you as part of your punishment.

Thus you found any place untaken as yours to sit on to enable you to eat at table or read a book, play cards or Uckers that is until it was time to turn in as some poor souls actually slept on the bench seats that you just sat around on. What on earth is Uckers I hear you ask – well it's the Royal Navy form of Ludo only played to the death. Many a tot has been lost over a game and the rivalry between departments is intense.

Odd as it may seem nobody pushed you out of the way or took over your space, living below decks on a second world war small frigate was at best crowded and uncomfortable. The guns came first, the crew second. Everything about a warship is peculiar and can only be likened to a small village or town with all departments being housed within strict physical limits. All your needs were met, you were fed three times per day, there was a fully functioning sickbay to look after your bodily welfare and health in general. Whenever feasible a film was shown on the upper deck. You had the means to defend yourself or attack others, you were kept warm and on bad days you were thoroughly soaked. Despite all of this we were happy and got paid for it at the same time and travelled to places and saw things that the population today will never see nor experience – even those on gap year travel.

One of the refinements that most sailors made to their hammock was the introduction of stretchers and these took the form of poles with a big notch in each end over which was stretched the hammock nettings (strings to the landlubber). This had the desired effect of holding both ends of the hammock open so that you didn't stifle in the wrap around effect that was normally created. Now then it must be said that when approximately 80 sailors are all looking for hammock stretchers at the same time it becomes almost impossible to find a pole suitable for the purpose – almost that is until some unfortunate left a broom unattended for anything over 5 seconds. The broom handle made two excellent stretchers the only downside was that most departments painted recognition marks on the handles to try to ward off would be pilferers. Marks are easily removed when out of sight of prying eyes especially those of the Buffer who developed an eye twitch within days of his taking over the running of the upper deck when all he had for clearing up was the most impressive pile of broom heads you could imagine.

One poor soul couldn't find a broom handle and decided to go up market and used one of the metal struts from his camp bed as a stretcher. This proved not to be his finest choice as he couldn't adjust the spacing of the nettles very easily and they were therefore at full stretch by the time he leaped into his hammock. All went well until the wee small hours of the morning when there was an almighty twang and like an arrow from a bow the metal spacer shot across the mess missing other sleepers by inches and soundly embedding itself into the huge (and only) hurricane fan, shearing off all of the blades and scaring the hell out of everyone. George or whatever his name was did well to escape the wrath of many only because he had to pay for a new fan and have it installed in the mess before we all dissolved from the heat.

Life on board

One of the first impressions of the old style warships was that everything was totally functional with no room for the niceties of life, it was not home away from home by any stretch of the imagination. Every passage way was lined with overhead pipes of varying colours e.g. red for steam lines etc. and then each of the pipes had colour and letter coding to assist the damage control personnel. There were valves and turn cocks all with brass fittings that were burnished by incessant polishing, there were punkah louvers set into the fan trunking just to circulate air that was only slightly cooler than that on the upper deck. The bulkheads were cream as was every other surface except the main deck,

The temperature on board was most of the time fairly hot in every compartment with the exception of those offices that had electrical equipment in and these rooms were air conditioned to remain static at 65 degrees to protect the equipment - not us. The only office

that was just downright uncomfortable was the Electronic Warfare Office that was situated just aft of the mast and forward of the funnel and was just big enough to house our two intercept pieces and two of us, plus a radar repeater. This meant that at “action stations” there would be three people enclosed in a box some 10 feet by 4 feet all of whom were expected to work at the very peak of their abilities. Not easy in temperatures well into the 90’s with humidity at about the same level.

It would be as well to at this stage to commit to paper exactly what Electronic Warfare was all about. To begin with and as pointed out earlier it was a sub branch of the general Communications department and dealt with listening out for the sounds that Radar emits and to then determine its origin (from aircraft, surface ships or submarines) and then establish whether it was friendly or not. The noise that comes out of a Radar is very distinctive but it is only by experience that you begin to understand all of the variations of sound, frequency shifts and aerial rotation and can then pass this information to the Operations Room for them to take note of. The equipment was the mighty UA3 which only had an accuracy of plus or minus 10 degrees. The other intercept unit was the FH4 and this dealt purely and simply with the pinpointing to within 10 degrees the source of a Morse code signal and this could really be handled by anybody who could read Morse and that was the essential ingredient .

The last but not least function of EW ratings was to engage in the interception of communications between military forces of other nations, write them down and pass by special couriers to the main intelligence office in your area.

On board this ship there were only two EW ratings including the writer and when not involved in EW matters we had to turn to in the main wireless office as normal radio operators. There was only one fly in the ointment and that was in the person of the Chief Radio Supervisor who took it upon himself to dislike EW people and then have them thrown off the ship by undermining all of their efforts and not letting them just get on with their jobs.

One forenoon when again we’d been told that as all was quiet there was nothing for us to do me and my chum got bored so went up on to the upper deck just to watch the world go by when along came the Buffer and he’s the Chief in charge of the upper deck and all of its cleaning and stowage. Very soon we’d volunteered to scrub down the main deck so armed with massive yard brooms and a hose pipe off we went. Let’s face it we were out in the open air in shorts, taking on a bit more of a tan so what could we wish for that was any better than that. Well it did get better in large chunks as the Buffer was telling everyone in the Chiefs mess that two mad communicators had actually turned out as seamen and helped out that very morning. Our Chief apparently lost so much face that he was in danger of becoming a laughing stock and was hopping from one foot to the other whilst he questioned us about the incident. The other point that Chieffie couldn’t get to grips with was that we were the new breed of sailor and actually spoke our mind to senior rates if it was necessary, this being almost unheard of in years gone by. We told him that we were trained radio operators and wanted to be treated as such . Things changed after that, he hated us even more but we got down to the work for which we had spent nearly a year in training. Having been allocated to a particular watch (shift) we now felt that at last we had arrived on the communications world with only one or two little blots on the landscape to mar our arrival.

Getting back to the leather sandals – Brilliantly made though they were they did have one serious drawback, namely that when new and when soaked on water the tannin soaked out of them. The resultant was the most peculiarly dyed feet. It got everywhere including between your toes so you looked as if you hadn't taken a bath for weeks.



The various divisions aboard ship are jealous of their position and what actually belongs to them e.g. the Forecastle (focs'1) looked after the pointed bit at the front of the ship and so on. Occasionally disputes would arise as upon the day that the Radar boys said that the upper part of the mast belonged to the communicators and the comms boys said that the seamen division had the responsibility and neither side was going up the stick to paint it.

As with all things in life a compromise was finally reached with the seamen having to paint the mast black up to the platform whereupon the communicators would takeover and paint all of the white bits white (namely the two yardarms and the uppermast upon which was sited the FH4 aerial). After discussions of some two minutes yours truly and one other were sent aloft armed with safety harness, brushes and pots of white paint. It was at this point that

my opposite number (oppo) decided to show his high wire act and hand standing ability on the ends of the yardarms – the Buffer was not at all impressed to judge by the demented scream for my mate to stop F***** about before someone below got hurt when he fell on them. Calm was restored and the Buffer and his team carried on painting bits of the upper deck obligatory green whilst the gunners oiled and painted a Bofors gun immediately below our position up in the clouds. Guns are normally painted black with the housing being grey and brass bits everywhere gleaming in the sunlight. I went aloft and strapped myself as tight as I could to the upper mast as I could and clung on for dear life and only painted those areas that I could actually see with the startlingly white paint.

I heard much moaning and yelling from below, it was the guns crew again who had caught sight of my mate walking along the top of the yardarm. This time he was carrying his paint pot in one hand and the brush in the other, his safety harness was around his waist – that is until one part tangled with his legs. It was at this point that the world went into slow motion – he half slipped and let go of the paint brush which described in a beautiful arc and disappeared over the side. Sadly he tottered the other way and managed to grab hold of the yardarm and thus saved himself from falling to a gruesome end, I say sadly because whilst making a grab for safety he let go of the paint pot.

The pot of white paint being heavier than the brush fell almost straight down whilst spinning over and over before it hit the beautifully serviced Bofors gun I really cannot describe the scene that opened up before my eyes but just think of Grey, black, brass, green deck, sailors (suntanned) and white paint, lots of white paint on almost every surface to a greater or lesser degree. Jackson Pollock in his maritime phase.

Now in military terms we held the high ground which probably saved us (I had now been included in this debacle) from being at best skinned alive. Now all of this incident took place during the forenoon when the sun was rising to almost directly over head. Hot, hotter, hottest gives an indication because the men at the bottom were not letting us down so there we stayed until sometime in the afternoon by which time we had acquired a deep reddish brown hue that hurt like hell. The long and the short of it was that the ships company saw the funny side of the whole silly episode and so my mate got away with cleaning, painting, and polishing everything that had the slightest drop of white paint on it. It took him for what seemed like forever to finish.

Life wasn't all just fun we had as a brand new crew to establish ourselves as a coherent fighting unit and so began what the navy always refers to as the workup. This means that every piece of equipment is put through its paces to see that it works to the satisfaction of the captain, which is a bit of a poke in the eye for the outgoing captain who has just spent the last eighteen months of service working with exactly the same equipment. The work up also meant that the new crew have to prove that they too are capable of being the best of the best so we fired the guns and dealt with imaginary fires, electrical breakdowns, engine failures, signal overloads, kit inspections until we dropped. Even though we worked hard the playing side of life was attended to with just as much zeal and dedication, hence captains defaulters being reasonably well attended.

There was one thing that has stood out in my mind since the day that I set foot on this ship and that was the Heads (lavatories in Naval speak). The loos were in a line of about twenty with a modesty panel between each that only came up to the height of your shoulder when you were actually sat on the throne. This meant that you could, if you so wished, carry

on a conversation with the next person to you as if you were sat at a dinner table. On the other hand I found it the most demeaning and degrading violation of my humanity and was really the only matter that made me feel less than a human being. It remains with me as a matter that I can never really forgive the Navy for imposing upon me, everything else was just service life and easily taken in one's stride.

To me this was generally the life that I had been looking for it was exciting to a young man who'd never set foot outside his native country to be many thousands of miles away on what was really one long, long holiday except that you couldn't plan your own route.

We sailed in and out of harbour, fired guns at ship targets and airborne ones as well as anything else that got in our way – we were the 3rd Frigate Squadron defending the empire against all that the rest of the world could throw at us. Our mighty flotilla of ships consisted of H.M. Ships Cardigan Bay, St.Brides Bay, Mounts Bay, Crane and either the New Zealand ships Rotoiti or Pukaki who joined for six months at a time. The sad part about it was that all the ships were of second world war vintage and were getting just a bit tired and all up could only muster about 15 knots so put us out frame when it came to any high speed chases. Oddly enough during an exercise we were pushed off to the outer reaches of all other ships on the basis that it would be awfully nice if we were to play on our own and leave the big boys to the more serious work. This we did with some gusto I believe but nonetheless we enjoyed ourselves.

On old black and white movies we'd all seen the navy dashing around after U Boats and throwing huge numbers of depth charges everywhere. This had of course by now become very old hat as modern ships were being fitted with mortar bombs with which to sink once detected submarines – our ship still proudly boasted depth charge throwers and stern racks with which to deliver the mortal blow to any submarine that had the temerity to come near us during a conflict. Came the day of exercise depth charge throwing when it was announced that because of limited stocks we could only let off about four of the beasts . However if you have never been in the vicinity of an exploding D.C. then it is hard to describe both the noise and the mighty upheaval of water that takes place but believe me it is quite spectacular.

One of the pluses to this sort of exercise is that it doesn't do the local fish population a lot of good and so we and other ships companies ate very well on fresh fish that very day.

The other anti submarine armament was the Hedgehog that was mounted in place of A gun (simple souls in the navy major guns are listed from A to Y starting at the bows and working aft). This piece of equipment consisted of what looked like a box on its side filled up with giant rocket heads, there were I believe 27 bomblets as they were called, which were let off in rapid firing sequence and directed straight over the bows. This meant that as soon as they were fired then the ship had to veer sharply to port or starboard to avoid going over the top of your own explosives. Thankfully this was achieved every time. Each time the firing was completed the whole setup was checked by one of the ASW ratings after having been told by the controller that all was clear. This didn't always work as it should and one poor guy still has a twitch I fear because as he rounded the firing screen and bent down to inspect the Hedgehog one remaining rogue missile fired missing him by inches . He passed out and the was never fired again during the time that I was on board.

We lived in the forward mess deck and our living space including tables and fixed locker bench seats measured 20 x 10 feet in which were crammed some twenty happy souls. It was here that we sat, ate, relaxed and slept.

Eating was quite an adventure as all of the food had to be collected from the galley in large metal trays and containers and then delivered to the mess where you as the duty mess hand had to distribute to all hands the fabulous fare. The food was basic but usually well cooked and it was highly unusual for there to be any left over at the end of each meal. If there was it meant that the cooks were having a bad day and we even worse.

Being out in the far eastern station meant that we enjoyed the best and worst of tropical weather from hot and dry to hot and humid and then to hot and very wet during the monsoons and sweating all of the time was the order of the day. This of course meant that on a non air conditioned ship we were always thirsty and water and tea was drunk in huge quantities – that is until the day that two out of the three water condensers broke down. What you have to understand is that the main priority is to keep the ship and its armament going no matter what event occurs so far as the Admiralty is concerned. This meant that the desalinated salt water first went to the main engines, if there was any supply left over then the crew could have some drinking water. That didn't last long and it was shortly thereafter that a second unit was partially working but only well enough to half do the job it was intended.

I must say that tea and coffee made with only partially desalinated water is without exception the most disgusting beverage that you can imagine. Nothing that was added could take away the cloying taste of salt unless you just drank the water after adding large quantities of lime powder to it. There we were - Limeys as the Yanks call us.

Like all things military your life was organised for you twenty fours of the day so that when something really out of the ordinary happens it stands out like a sore thumb. Such a matter arose one sunny day. The captain had declared that this particular afternoon would best be served by the whole crew taking part in what is known as Evolutions, this is when groups from one department take over the role and functions of another e.g. The cooks manned the upper deck whilst the seamen were sent below to the boiler room and so on. On this occasion somebody dropped a real clanger – the communicators of all people were to take over one of the port side Bofors guns and carry out a live firing at an aircraft towed drogue something like an enormous wind sock. The writer at one stage was given an enormous metal helmet and ordered to take the firing position which on a Bofors is a padded seat with foot rests. Immediately in front of you is a joystick which traverses the gun and also has a firing button on it to be used at the appropriate time then for the kill – look straight through the spiders web gun sight and that's all there is to it. The long and the short of it is that we successfully fired of two clips of ammunition in the approximate direction of the target but as we followed the aircraft towards the bows of the ship there was a slight mishap in that the automatic stop point didn't work and the gun overrode it quite smoothly. Still firing the writer followed the target (this was John Wayne movie style) only to place two shells directly over the bridge.

The Captain at this point had chosen to look aft to see what exactly was happening and it was then that both shells parted his hair or so we were told by the Chief Yeoman as the Captain had lost the power of speech and almost his command.

In all of my service career I was never asked to man a gun again. Pity really as it had been great fun at the time and every schoolboy's dream.

Washing hammocks was quite an exercise in itself and I having like many others spent a great deal of time in the bathrooms scrubbing with deck brooms and copious quantities of industrial soap found that it was only partially successful in removing the grime that whitish canvass can attract.

An old salt came to my rescue one afternoon – “what a waste of good sleeping time that is” he said. “Bring your pit and I’ll show you the easiest and best way to get it clean”. Well eager to learn and not to waste time I followed this guy down to the stern of the ship whereupon he lashed the hammock to an upright stanchion and then threw it overboard. You must appreciate that we were miles out at sea and thundering along at our max 14 knots at the time when this all took place.

I was mortified, I could already picture myself in front of the Captain on a charge of deliberately damaging Admiralty property as being just one of the lesser charges.

“Leave it for half an hour and that’ll be as clean as a whistle” said my chum. That was one of the longest half hours that I could remember waiting through until I managed to pull the hammock out of the sea and safely on to the quarter deck. We hung up the canvass and just left it to dry in the afternoon sun only to return sometime later to find the whitest hammock that I’d ever set eyes upon. I didn’t try it again as I’m convinced that all would not have turned out as well a second time.

Whilst sitting around on the quarter deck I came to realise just how close to the rolling deep we actually were – in this case just a few feet but more worryingly was that all that separated us from a long swim home was half inch steel plates. Sobering thoughts really that it didn’t do to dwell on for any length of time.

At this time we were some way off the Singapore/Malayan coast but it was odd to note the smell of the land even though there was none in sight, as I’ve said it was a mixture of vegetation, sugar and dampness which when combined gave quite a heady aroma that was not at all unpleasant. It was a smell that was to stay with me until today. Funny thing the nose and what memories it can rekindle.

One of the few visits that were to come my way was that of our sailing to one of the largest ports on Asia – Port Swettenham as it was known at the time and had been named after the Governor of that part of the Malayan states in about 1900 or so.

This area of Malaya we were told was a malaria infested part of the country so it was then that the issue of anti malaria tablets was made to each and every one of us in the form of khaki coloured tablets – Paladrin – and these were to be taken before our visit and then some 10 days after sailing out again just in case the little blighters got you. These tablets were not candy coated to enable a quick swallow but were rough and actually stuck to the tongue, so being clever I armed myself with glass of water and decided to scrunch the tablet to a powder and then wash it all down in one quick slurp. The taste of a crushed Paladrin tablet is unbelievably vile and no matter what I ate, drank or swallowed for the next week or so it was always the same – neat Quinine.

I must say that the visit to Kuala Lumpur was probably the most uneventful of any that I've made throughout the world since that time and really there's not a lot to say about the place.

Before we were actually let ashore the ship's Doctor gave his lecture on the perils of unprotected sex and of the dire consequences of having one glass of beer to many and then viewing every old harpie as the love of your life and waking up several days later after your night of passion with all sorts of nasty things happening in the wedding tackle department. Condoms are the answer to these perils and we were urged, no directed, to avail ourselves from the ship's stock.

There was a box on the outside of the sickbay and as we went out we helped ourselves to the contents – Protection, naval, Willy for the use of was the theme. I grabbed a handful much to the cheers of the older hands who discretely took one or two and it was suggested that the amount taken be me seemed a little too ambitious by any standards. Perhaps they were right I didn't use even one let alone the dozen or so in my pocket.

Back at sea with clear blue skies above me and my EW chum were detailed off to clean all of the aerial connectors at the base of the mast and so set off armed with cleaning rags, metal polish and heavy duty petroleum jelly. What you must understand is that in those days all communications to and from the ship were by Morse code or RATT and as such needed long wire aerials suspended from the yardarms and attached to the deck by huge nuts and bolts mainly made of copper and brass. Our job was to clean off all of the accumulated salt and verdigris, polish the connectors, then cover the whole lot in the petroleum jelly. Secondly there were also aerials and connection points in particular for one fairly Powerful transmitter called an 89Q which had an output that could fry eggs. Unfortunately neither the leading hand in the wireless office nor us had taken the safety boards' (these are like big main 0 fuses up to the bridge – The officer of the watch was not impressed so that before we'd even started cleaning we managed to get a bollocking as apparently the output from the 89Q can kill you and they thought that this would be a bit inconvenient.

We saw from the outset that the whole operation needed to be done on a production line basis so we set off by disconnecting all of the aerials but one then I brushed and scrapped, my mate applied the polish, I buffed up the connectors and finally the jelly was reapplied and the whole thing re bolted together again. Simple, straightforward and of course highly efficient. The sun was shining, the sea was flat so what should we do but take our time with this job. It was about an hour into our task that the first inkling that something wasn't quite right manifested itself in the shape of one very red faced leading radio operator screaming quite an assortment of obscenities at us for cutting us off from the rest of the navy. We'd apparently missed about an hour and a half of the main ship signal broadcast, the local radio station had signals for us but couldn't make contact, and we therefore couldn't send out any signals as we were unable to hear any responses from anybody.

The wireless office staff on watch were not best pleased as you can imagine. Our job for quite sometime was the collection of all missed signal traffic. It took hours and hours as the broadcast was repeated every four hours in a sequence of three so we had to check every signal over a period of 16 hours just to make sure that we hadn't missed all of the signals that weren't even for us in the first place.

Word was spreading – don't let the EW boys anywhere near anything on any part of the ship that was mechanical or mechanised at any time for any reason. This we thought was

a little unjustified to say the least but it was great to have a reputation that nobody else could match. No more the mutterings behind closed doors the Sandeman had arrived.

The Sandeman was the logo on a certain brew of sherry/port and looked a bit like Zoro and was universally used by the EW branch just as bit of fun and to annoy the General branch who thought we were far too much taken up with the secret war. We were part of the intelligence gathering section and came under MI8 so therefore I suppose we were engaged in the secret war against potential enemies.

Sailors by their very makeup are very superstitious about almost everything that you could imagine, like women going to sea overnight. A day trip is alright but any longer than that and we began to twitch a bit. How the modern day Navy deals with this matter I really cannot imagine as you now have women serving on board as ratings and even worse women in overall charge of a warship. Perhaps this is why there seems to be a lot of bad luck e.g. being captured by the Iranians. Even worse, is the thought of a woman in charge of the main armament on board a Man of war, and she's having a bout of PMT. The consequences could be at best Catastrophic. Can you imagine the scene.

One forenoon there was a lot of noise and a general state of panic from down aft near one of the main airlocks to the boiler room. Several stokers were stood outside in the passageway trying to calm down one of their comrades who was making it perfectly obvious that he was not going back down in to the boiler room under any circumstances and wanted to be transferred off the ship. It seems whilst he was on duty on the fire plate he'd seen a stoker walk around the end of the main boiler and then proceed aft. He'd thought that his mate who was on duty with him, but had gone topsides to make a brew, had returned quite quickly. What was always apparent on the old ships where there was an airlock was that as soon as you opened the main hatch was that there was an immediate air suction that you always felt. This rating just thought that he'd worked down there so long that he'd become so used to the phenomena that he'd not taken any notice. It was only when his mate actually opened the airlock and came down the main up and down steel ladder carrying his drink that he realised that he'd seen what to him was a ghost. He left the boiler room making a mad dash for freedom and to his mind safety and it was so that there was the disturbance in the port side flat.

What he didn't know was that a stoker rating had died in the boiler house some two years earlier. So had our man actually seen the tormented soul, still working and unable to leave the ship ????. Who knows ????

Runs ashore are the life blood of the Royal Navy. It's the time when you can get away from all of the other souls and have space around you to walk and think. It's also the time for a beer, no several beers. It's a time to make a fool of yourself and Jolly Jack Tar invariably did. None of Jacks antics were vicious nor premeditated nor was there ever a thought that he was out to harm anybody. It was a time to chase the opposite sex and see if one could be caught.

One night three of our merry band of EW brothers set off for the flesh pots of Singapore. We assembled at Sembawang Gate and caught a pirate taxi , they Charged 1 Malay dollar per person and could get a lot of people in a Mercedes Saloon.

Most of the evening is by now a blur because of the passing of time but the event that sticks out is that all three of us decided that as we crossed a main highway that it would be good idea to play leapfrog over the keep left signs in the middle of the road. It was on the third set that several people in military uniforms and sporting red caps tried to attract our attention by screaming at us as only the Army can do. We were invited to join them in their little house on the other side of the road and this we did much to the delight of all the other revellers who'd escaped the wrath of the RED CAPS.

We were made to stand in front of this very red faced bloke (rank unknown as he was Army and we hadn't a clue) who started shouting at us demanding to know which unit we were from which we could only answer in the negative. He didn't like that at all and screeched that we must belong to one regiment or another and it was then that the penny dropped. "Oh" we said "we're all in the Navy""What ship"? he demanded" Cardigan Bay, Mounts Bay and St Brides Bay" we said. The man from the army looked close to tears at this point and left the room only to return moments later with a CPO who marched us in to his office. When we explained what we'd been up to he started laughing and then advised that he was going to put on a show for the Army. At this point he closed the door and then started to rant and rave about discipline and letting the side down and that he may have to report this to our respective ships. The tirade went on for a full five minutes before he took breath and then he whispered with a broad grin all over his face "Not bad eh!"We were then marched out past the Army who looked smug and self satisfied, onto the street and told to piss off and stop wasting everyone's time.

I suppose that because we'd gone ashore in civvies we were undetectable as Navy Personnel.

It was shortly after this incident that we were drafted from the ship and sent off to Kranji Wireless Station which was situated at the north end of Singapore island and not too far from the causeway into Johore Bahru. It seemed that the miserable old CPO Tel had finally got his way and got rid of a branch of the navy that he didn't understand and as such couldn't accept it. On reflection I had heard tales that at one time or another the EW branch was used to eavesdrop on the RN during exercises to make sure that they stuck by all of the rules and didn't compromise the ship and others by making mistakes whilst sending Morse coded signal traffic. So because we couldn't tell the general communications branch exactly what we did when on intercept duties some of them thought we were constantly monitoring them. Daft assumption really because in the whole of my time in the EW Branch I was only called upon once to monitor the other ships and sure enough one of them made the classic error of sending out their standard call sign when they should have used the fully encrypted version. When an error like this was committed it was the proper practice for the operator to be taken off that circuit and replaced with another who would not transmit any signals for at least 30 minutes. The idea was that the enemy (if any) who may also have been monitoring naval ships on exercise wouldn't be able to pin down which ship was then on air. Every radio operator has a peculiar way of sending Morse coded signals and it is like his own signature which can be detected anywhere in the world – hence Joe Bloggs makes an error the enemy then know what ship he's on even though the call sign is now encrypted. Hence the half an hour delay.

We said our goodbyes to shipmates that we had known for just three months and left a life that I had thus so far fully enjoyed. Adios Cardigan Bay.

The Ship

Pennant Number	F630
Tonnage	1580
Overall length	307 feet
Beam	38 feet 6 inches
Draft	12 feet 9 inches
Speed	19 – 20 knots (max that we knew of was 14)
Armament	4 x 4 guns (2 turrets) 6 Bofors 6 Oerlikons 4 Depth charge throwers 2 Depth charge stern rails 1 Hedgehog

A lovely ship that rolled and rolled so much that it even appeared to do so in harbour.



Shore based- KRANJI

Again I can't recall much about the journey from the Naval Base at HMS Terror to the outpost, so it seemed, set in what was at that time jungle and as far removed from the sea as you could possibly get other than both me and my chum felt quite depressed about the whole matter. It wasn't until years later when I looked back on my navy life and saw that it was from that point on that I enjoyed the most marvellous navy career that could be imagined. The miserable old CPO had as it turned out done me an enormous favour in having me drafted even though it hurt at the time. I found out later that a lot of the guys at Kranji had all been transferred from the 3rd F.S. – serious plot against the intelligence gathering department I feel. I was still at that time listed as being RO(S) for special branch (not the same as the police).

The CPO who'd sent us off from the 3rd FS was known as "the Mekon" as he looked just like the character who was the great enemy of Dan Dare in the Eagle comic. He had hooded eyes that bulged like table tennis balls and a small pointed nose. All in all a nasty bastard.

Kranji Wireless station is/was situated some two miles in land from the main Naval base at HMS Terror and was only reached by a tarmac road which crossed over the main railway line at the tiny village of Yew Tee. The area covered by this station was large but it was completely surrounded by a twelve feet high fence made of angle iron girders spaced so that you couldn't squeeze between them but it kept out larger animals and assorted villagers.

The one noticeable thing when we arrived was that everyone seemed friendly and were pleased to see us with the exception of only one or two people. We had to now complete a joining routine which as I've said meant attending at every department, registering with them and having a card marked to say that you had done so. One of the oddest departments that I've had to register with was that of Sew – Sew, a Chinese lady of indeterminate years who had a kiosk on the base from which she sold anything and everything that you could imagine, and many things you really didn't want to know about. She was the base money lender who would lend money at whatever percentage she could get away with on money borrowed during blank week. Useful but expensive best describes Sew Sew.

I had sandals made by one of Sew Sew's team as well as trousers – always black – which a small band of us wore along with white shirts, white socks and black shoes. We thought that we really looked the business as part of our own little posse. In reality We looked more like a mobile zebra crossing than smooth.

On the basis that we had completed a leaving routine earlier that morning by the time 12.30 arrived we were getting just a little frayed around the edges. I'll never forget seeing the main building, it was something out of the old British Colonial days with high columns, high ceilings and massive louvered doors and Windows. The air conditioning was by way of open windows, to be precise the windows were never shut as the temperature was always too high and you needed all the help that you could muster to keep reasonably cool.





Literally opposite our quarters was the base swimming pool set amongst the Jacaranda trees and that there was not a day that passed that I didn't go for a plunge and at the end of my time in the Far East I was probably developing gills.

It didn't take very long to fall into the pattern of life at an outpost of the mighty Navy where there was very little discipline imposed, but nobody really over stepped the mark (well they did but just didn't get caught) or took advantage of others and so life was good. We worked damned hard and played just as well and were therefore left alone most of the time by the powers that be.

We worked an odd shift pattern, odd that is by comparison to ship board watch patterns where it was nearly always one watch on and then two off which enabled you to be on duty at different times of the day. Ashore the shift sequence ran as follows :-

A'noon 1300 – 1900

Forenoon 0800 – 1300

All night 1900 – 0800 (the same night)

and so on with other variations thrown in to enable you to have time off including weekends on a regular basis.

The other oddity was that we worked all day and up until 23.30 in the EWO and then transferred to the main wireless office to join in with normal communications activities like manning the Singapore to Whitehall teleprinter link or one of the ship shore radio frequencies to receive or send merchant and military signals. What was so nice was that so long as we "specials" put in the same effort as the others we were treated just as one of the team – some difference from the treatment meted out by The Mekon aboard Cardigan Bay.



The EWO was made up of just one large room subdivided into the day centre and the rest was devoted to the radio intercept room. The whole place was quite sparse and the furniture was just long desks along three walls with associated receiving bays fitted with three B40 receivers each (6 Bays in all).

There was no air conditioning at all and the air only moved because of the huge fans set in the ceiling and a row of permanently open mini windows that had huge metal grills set across them to prevent someone, and we were never sure who that might have been, from entering and taking away the top secret coffee pot that we had. All other sensitive material was despatched from the office every morning by courier.

Prior to WW 2 Kranji had been an intercept station primarily to read the signal traffic of the Japanese armed forces and was instrumental in the breaking of their codes with the exception of one. Now we were employed in the same field of activity only by now the enemy was far further south but extraordinarily close to – INDONESIA was now the biggest threat and our job was to intercept their Naval and Air force communications. This feat we accomplished with great success and I've always hoped that the effort that we put in gave our intelligence departments all of the information that was needed to bring about an early end to the conflict that unfolded. Our particular speciality was the interception of the Indonesian Naval traffic sent from their three main centres at Surabaya, Djakarta and Palikpapan .

The call signs of these bases are etched in to my memory P3S was Surabaya. P1D was Djakarta and P7P was Palikpapan and this last one only came on air every so often so it was quite a coup to pick up their Morse signals.

P7P had the slowest of all the radio operators on any circuit we came across with the exception of the Army, having said that most Army ops throughout the world were slow operators. Probably because their field of operations was usually out in the wilds.

The other intercept duty that we were given to undertake was that of keeping pace with the Indonesian Air Force and that was no mean feat as those boys knew how to handle a Morse key. Their average sending speed was anywhere between 25 and 30 words per minute – in other words damned fast when we actually wrote down the intercepted signals on a pad with pencils and even worse we used only capital letters. Boy was I good at that job, and yes I do boast because there was only one person in the whole of the EW world who was considered better than me and I still cannot remember his name only that he came from Guernsey.

The Indon call signs were Yee, Yes, Yea, Yea2, Yei (?) An odd thing that I remember was that after about three months I actually developed calluses on the ends of my fingers and thumb on my right hand due to the constant holding of a pencil. We only progressed to using type writers when the Aussie navy personnel joined us but even then the pencil was always the weapon of choice so I went back to it very quickly. There was of course more to the job than explained.

Many years later I learned that the RAN radio operators who served with us were presented with their own Naval General Service medal as they were part of the intelligence gatherers group in the Far East station. We on the other hand who showed them what to do and were better than they, were told by our country that we were not entitled to any form of recognition. Still I suppose that the nature of the Covert world.

The Aussie group became good friends after they stopped boasting about all things Australian which didn't take long as sailors are well known for their ability to cut away the rubbish and take someone down a peg or two. The names that I can remember are Kennedy, R E Bunn and Tom Lane. Kennedy (can't remember his first name) was married and soon set up house with his family at the end of the Mandai road in Seletar Hills district and I spent that one Christmas with them and enjoyed the best of Aussie hospitality that you can get.

Bunn – The Rebel – introduced me to the delights of Jack Kerouac, Ginsberg and other leaders of the beat generation and I still remember the delights of “On the road” and the two main characters driving stark naked the beaten up Cadillac across one of the desert areas of America this at the time was quite erotic stuff. REB had enjoyed a chequered career in the Australian navy as he'd been on the run twice, the last of which had seen him working on a sugar cane plantation literally working as a labourer cutting the cane He was caught and returned to duty without being sent to jail on the basis that he joined the intercept world.

REB bought a sports car – an MG TF open top, bright red and the obligatory wire wheels – he and I would drive into the villages of Bukit Panjang and Bukit Timah or down to Singapore city feeling as if we owned the place. Not surprising really as the whole of the island was dominated by the military in some form or another.

We would whisk down the highways with not a care in the world even when we saw whole families gathered around a standpipe at the side of the road have their daily wash/bath. To us it had become such a normal every day sight that we just wafted past and thought nothing of the poverty that these people were enduring.

Singapore was just another pink bit on the world atlas owned by us the British or so we were led to believe not by direct teaching as such but by attitude. Interesting really as most of us at that time had never ventured beyond the shores of Merry England even for a foreign holiday and here we were thinking of the locals as almost the noble savage. Arrogant blighters that we were, but didn't know any different to alter anything.

In our defence I would say that we didn't knowingly go out of our way to harm anyone nor did we in the Navy actually treat any person with disdain more over we always tried to befriend anyone. Funny lot us sailors, perhaps it was that we normally lived in conditions that were themselves very poor and not so far removed from the less fortunate that we encountered.

What worried us more than anything was hitting people and cattle which wandered on to the highways with alarming regularity and with no thought of survival beyond that. One of the worst culprits in Singapore City was the trishaw boys – these were the cheap fun filled means of transport for anyone mad enough to get in them and consisted of a heavy duty bicycle with an open sidecar that seated two passengers.

The whole machine was propelled by the fittest Chinese cyclists you will find who Drove out into the roadway, paths and anywhere that they could fit their machines to try to get you to your destination as quickly as possible – a big tip being the obvious idea. Because of the number of accidents and that these trishaw owners were paid a heavy commission by brothel owners to deliver prospective customers to their establishments, they became a banned form of transport for the military personnel. We being Navy never considered

ourselves as being in any way part of the military so used the trishaws for cheap thrill journeys at every possible opportunity.

The other big travelling worry was the storm drains. These manmade drains were enormous being some six feet deep and up to fifteen feet wide were excavated to take the huge amounts of surface water that surged throughout every part of Singapore during the monsoons when the down pours of rain was in deluge proportions. The thought of crashing into one of these was always on your mind as they were either dealing with a raging torrent which you could drown in or empty and full of rubbish including we think part of the sewerage outflows. Snakes liked these drains as did other indescribable wriggly creatures some of which had probably not been discovered by modern science. Having said all of that I can remember many a time after a night on the town sitting with our legs hanging over the edges of the storm drains eating a kebab and drinking hot sickly sweet tea made by a street vendor whilst we waited either for a bus or the next taxi. The madness of youth yes but a whole lot of fun.

Tom Lane and the last of the Aussies decided that they would like to live off base and between them they leased a three bedded bungalow just outside Bukit Panjang and once having settled in this was to be the in place for the odd wild party or two. Whilst there were several of us from Kranji it has never been a good idea to have a party with just males – well that's what the Navy always think – and so some of the lovelies from the local bars etc would be invited along just for decorative purposes you understand. Well over a period of time Tom became more that friendly with one of the ladies so that she had the run of the house so to speak and all was harmonious. Harmonious that is until one day there was an argument, I think it was about groceries of all things, and Tom was due on duty. Naturally he wasn't that interested in the conversation until he was confronted by a very unhappy Chinese girl wielding a Ghurkha kukri (a nasty knife no matter who is holding it) and then she had his undivided attention. Luckily Tom was fairly agile enough to avoid the second swipe of the blade which slashed his shirt and T shirt from shoulder to navel but didn't cut his skin in any one place. Lord only knows what sort of mess there would have been had she actually connected. Tom gave up the lease shortly after the day of the short knife – he was a beaten man.

The other event that sticks in my mind about the bungalow was when after another of Tom's happy evenings I and others stayed over – well we weren't even capable of walking the 100 yards or so to the main road to hail a cab and there were no telephones at the bungalow – to sleep it off. Early the next morning I got up and decided it was time for the obligatory cold shower so off I marched turned on the shower and in I went. Now the shower room wasn't the best that I've used but it was the only one in town so to speak. The walls and floor were not tiled they just had very smooth rendered cement on them. There was only a very weak light so everything looked grey including the Cobra curled up in the corner who was looking a bit harassed at having been woken up by a jet of cold water and a naked ME. I dived out yelling my head off, the snake lunged out and made off through a hole in the floor and everyone was up moaning about all of the noise and that it could only have been me. They hadn't seen the snake at all so judgements were questioned and I took a lot of stick for quite some time after that scaly event Nice I thought, just what I needed was support not bellyaching by hung over sailors.

Showers after that day were not the same – I had a mental block about them. The end of an era really when we all split up and went off to other parts of the World as we'd had some pretty wild times.

One of the problems that faced us in world communications was the sun spot activity which is on an eleven year cycle and had the weirdest effects on our signal capability. One moment we could be in touch with Whitehall and the next we'd find ourselves cut off for 2/3 days at a time. Morse transmissions were thrown in to disarray as well in that local ships couldn't hear us, we could hear ships trying to call shore stations around the United Kingdom and Northern Europe.

One night I was sitting at one of the ship/shore bays receiving and sending routine traffic from all and sundry when who should come on air out of and in amongst the myriad of Morse signals from every kind of transmitter you could think of but one of the mighty Queens, which one it was escapes me, and her operator was calling repeatedly for Portishead Radio Station with no success whatsoever.

So just for a bit of fun I sent out the letters DE which indicates to all ships that someone is willing to take their signal traffic, the operator stopped sending and the frequency went quiet. DE was sent again and lo and behold the Queen answered asking who we were and where. Yippee ,I thought, I've cracked it and so proceeded to tell all to the radio man at the other end, all the time thinking about the feather in my cap to have taken messages from Queen ????? only to be told in no uncertain terms that they had 200 telegrams to go and that we were too small to handle that sort of volume. A bit miffed at this I went on to take a signal from a Swedish ship who was quite happy to " talk " to someone. About two hours later The Queen was still calling for help and assistance from PH Radio The Queens normally would start their signal routine when they were about 24 hours from Southampton and would send their telegrams in batches of 50 and all of the signals were in Morse code and having been converted to a Morse tape and was therefore perfectly formed Morse code and set at a speed set by the operator who just sat back and let it happen.

As said my watch pattern was different from the rest of the base I turned up in the main wireless office one dark and mellow night at 23.30 as usual only to find that there hadn't been any signal traffic either from or to Whitehall wireless for 48 hours and sitting on the desk by the main link were approximately 250 messages to be sent. Not good I thought, this had all the possibilities of a very long eight hours to come. So it was actually true because nothing of any note happened until my next duty when the signal pile was even greater.

Finally contact was made with Whitehall W/T and I agreed with the operator on the other end that we'd send the signals in batches of 50. So off we went literally sending one or two signals per minute, logging them as they were despatched. All went well until I'd sent fifteen or so when I was given the signal to stop. Apparently the operator at the other end was a WRNS who all of a sudden couldn't cope and had broken down in floods of tears according to the OOW on duty. All was sorted out and we started again and it was nearly 8 hours later that the last of the backlog was cleared and some sort of normality restored. I remember coming out of the watch room at 0800 absolutely knackered and just grabbed a cup of coffee and went off to bed. It had been a good day for the communications department. Respect for ability had been hard earned.



H.M.S Cavalier – The loan draft

One morning after having turned in following the all night watch I was rudely awakened by one of the junior staff advising that I was required in the EWO by our CRS and to be quick about it. Having invited this erk to go away and do the other thing I immediately fell asleep again. At 1030a more robust awakening took place and my presence in the EWO was this time demanded, so full of good grace and well being towards my fellow beings I staggered down to the office to be confronted by a red faced CRS who wasn't happy that I hadn't appeared on the first call. I remember advising him that I wasn't all that enamoured at being woken up after only an hours sleep following a 24 hours duty stint which he didn't do because he was just a day boy. It didn't help I must say because my sailing orders were almost thrown at me – I had 2 hours grace to get together a steaming kit and present myself to HMS Cavalier which was sailing at 13.00 for Gan Island in The Maldives. A steaming kit was the bare essentials that you would require for a short passage or voyage and as this was to be a trip to a tropical island with not a chance of any bullshit or divisions it was sensible to pack only tropical working gear – blue shorts, number 8 shirts, sandals, caps were always compulsory, towels etc were the order of the day. The whole business of joining/leaving routine was essentially waived and I was ushered out of Kranji in the blue 5 ton postman's truck and launched off to the main dockyard via HMS Terror to join my second ship in three months not counting shore bases.

There alongside was the greyhound of the seas – the Cavalier – famous for its looks as well as holding the speed record of 32mph over a one mile course. This was more like it I thought, now I was on a proper ship – more than that it was a famous destroyer that everyone had heard of and now comprised one of the 8th Destroyer Squadron based in the Far East. All of the ships in the 8th DS had names starting with the letters CA of which there were funnily enough eight in commission.

Cavalier, Cavendish, Carysfort, Caesar, Cambrian, Cassandra, Caprice and Carron.



All of these ships of the line had been laid down and built during the period 1942 – 1944 and had thus seen service during WW2 and had remarkably survived to the early sixties. I've suddenly thought as I write these few words the period of my activity in these ships was when they were not even twenty years old and were not the oldest afloat. A sobering thought none the less.

Another joining routine took place even to the point that I was issued with A brand new set of cap tallies – one with gold wire for the best cap and the second one of silk/rayon for the working cap. Odd really in that I was only on board as a supernumerary rating assigned for a special mission and would not in all conscience be worn by me when going ashore on the islands. However I liked the thought of receiving a new ships name on my cap.



It was only when I was introduced to the radio department that I found out exactly what my task was to be – to intercept and log the signals from the Maldives only major seagoing vessel and to make sure that everybody knew what this ship was doing. I think that all of the signal traffic was in the clear – in plain English to be precise (or Maldivian) – but the memory could be fading so I won't guarantee the position. The one thing that I do remember as if it were yesterday was the call sign of that ship – it was MM8.

What she carried we will never know but there were the references to pineapples which in military speak was – Hand grenades or so we imaginatively thought . Why we bothered is a mystery only known to their Lordships at the Admiralty but so far as we were led to believe we were protecting one of the RAF's far flung outposts GAN in the Addu Atoll – from the clutches of the evil and rightful owners of the Maldives namely their own government. Mind you there may have been attempts at the overthrow/coup but this was not for us to question.

At 13.00 on the dot the gangway was hauled in and we cast off ready to take on the world and it was at this point that I realised that having just a steaming kit had its advantages – I didn't have to parade in best bib and tucker for leaving harbour, which was a feature when leaving harbour during daylight hours. For some reason the Navy liked to effectively parade their ships to all and sundry and in particular to the local admiral who it must be said was probably not in when you cast off. The problem was that the admiral or his staff would award their comments to the captain i.e. say that we were great, a credit to the Navy, an absolute shower or something on the upper deck was not looking up to scratch. If the latter then the captain would get hacked off and everyone would know all about it – the usual bullshit in other words. Still bless them they liked their military bit.

This had been what was euphemistically known as “a pier head jump” namely that I had arrived just as the ship was to sail and had already cast off except for the gangway being hauled inboard.

The communicators mess deck was as far aft as could be arranged and not in the usual spot which was almost in the paint locker in the bows of the ship. I didn't mind where we were to live, sleep and generally live as long as it was in Naval terms comfortable. This billet wasn't. Upon signing on I was issued with a canvass camp bed (refer back to the section on hammocks) instead of a hammock, a key to a locker in which to stow my kit and was promptly left to my own devices. The crew on board were great and accepted that I was there only for the duration of this trip and apart from the odd moan made me feel quite welcome.

The only place left for me to "pitch" my camp bed was halfway under the main ladder leading down into the mess deck, and the other half against a piece of machinery with a crank handle attached to it. Whilst this wasn't too bad a pitch nobody told me that at least once per night and usually during the middle, an on duty stoker rating came down and gave this little engine a few turns with the crank handle. Now I can and could sleep through a thunderstorm, gunfire and any other major noise but this little monster was something again, it woke me up every time.

The Navy name all of the duty watches so that nobody is left in any doubt as to where they should be at any time of the day or night as follows :-

0800 – 1200 Forenoon
1200 - 1600 Afternoon
1600 - 1800 First dog watch
1800 - 2000 Last dog watch
2000 - 2359 First
0001 - 0400 Middle (the graveyard watch is an
alternative term)
0400 - 0800 Morning

So as not to have the same duty every day the rotation of times on duty was achieved by serving out every third duty which meant that if you started off with the forenoon one day the next daylight watch would be the afternoon on the following day and so on.

We sailed almost as soon as I was on board with all of the usual noise and ceremony that goes with a leaving harbour routine in the Royal Navy, best uniforms were worn, whistles and Bosun's calls blown whilst ensigns were dipped to the ships of senior officers and all the time the ship had to be navigated in fairly restricted waters without the ignominy of hitting another ship or vessel. Thankfully I didn't have to join in with all of this palaver as I was the new boy with only a steaming kit to his name – I did have a new cap tally to boast but no time to tie it neatly around my hat.

The journey up the Malacca Straits was like any other I have since found out in that we challenged every ship that we met and kept a weather eye out for the local pirates of whom there were many operating out of the marshy inlets that dot the coastline of the island of Sumatra. These blighters would charge out from the marshes in high speed boats and board any vessel that they could, probably kill the crew and anyone else on board and then dispose of the cargo anywhere in the Far East.

We met none in our short journey and everyone settled down to deep ocean cruising which at the time was always at the speed of 14 knots – it saved fuel apparently – night had fallen and I'd been given the middle watch in the wireless office as general dogsbody so I thought that it would be as well not to be late for my first set duty so settled down in the mess just to read a book. Some of the crew were either on duty or just lounging on deck except for me and a couple of others who were writing letters home when over the Tannoy came the dulcet tones of the Officer of the Watch advising that we would shortly be turning fairly sharply to port.

Now this ship didn't have air conditioning but had to make do with scuttles (portholes to landlubbers) being open and to take the maximum advantage of our speed through the water and the general wind speed we had the use of wind scoops. This piece of equipment was like a metal gauntlet but open at both ends that was thrust in to the scuttle thus creating a pretty hefty wind blast into the mess.

One of the bods was told to take in the wind scoop and close the scuttle. He looked up from his letter writing mumbled something along the lines that there wasn't any need for panic and then gazed longingly at a photograph of his girl friend or wife.

So taken up with his day dreaming he didn't take much notice of the ship heeling over that is until this huge jet of water hit him smack on the side of his head knocking him sideways of his seat. His photo, writing equipment, cup of coffee all ended up on the deck in about an inch of water which much to his amazement he was made to fully mop up as well as dry off every wet surface before we could all turn in. The wind scoop had fared badly – it was bent back and couldn't be taken out of the scuttle.

Leaning over the side of a moving vessel, a very few feet above the waves, at night with no moon to speak of and hammering away at one of the finest naval inventions of all times is not an exercise for the feint hearted. I bet he didn't do it again.

The rest of the voyage over to the Maldives was at a slow and easy pace and at best totally uneventful.



We arrived at Gan island after having relieved HMS Cavendish and the whole hand over was dealt with in double quick time as they wanted to be off and back to civilisation at the earliest opportunity for some inexplicable reason.

To anyone who has been to the Maldives they are perfection as you cannot get further to escapism than there – what with the islands being about six feet above the mean sea level, white sandy beaches and swaying palms with the bluest calmest sea that you can begin to imagine. Why would anyone want to give that up was beyond me !!!!

Here we stayed for some weeks with the anchor secured to something and we just watched the world go by, went ashore to laze on the beach and have a swim when it suited us or did absolutely nothing but watched the sand sharks gathering around the pier. My official duties of monitoring the signals from MM8 only covered the Forenoon or Afternoon watch system so apart from that I was employed as a normal watch keeping radio operator.

The object of the exercise apparently was to protect British interests in the Indian Ocean, and to make sure that the island of Gan did not fall into the wrong hands. This protection bit we did very well as nobody came near us for weeks and the days merged one into another as we swam and watched the occasional aircraft land and take off with only limited interest until three mighty V Bombers came to the island on route to somewhere important we thought. They were one really impressive sight I must say, and the noise from their engines was unbelievable.

Quite obviously the biggest recreation was to go ashore for either a drink on the RAF base or more often than not just to laze around on the pure white sands of the beach. We messed around, swam and generally had a nice relaxing time.

The RAF in their wisdom had made a huge swimming platform out of wood and taken this out on to the reef and there secured it by way of a massive chain sunk into a concrete block. As you know everything weighs less under water and so there was no problem for the four of us to lift the chain and block out of the water and dump it onto the deck. For some peculiar reason this platform had been fitted with four oars (big) fully secured so there was no chance of losing the same.

We were now mobile, a new addition to the fleet so off we went at a fair lick once we had coordinated our rowing effort heading out across the reef. All went well for the first 25 yards and it was then that we hit this sticky uppy bit of coral, that is, we drove straight on top of it and was thereon impaled. We rowed and rowed and only succeeded in going around in a circular manner and not actually gaining any distance. After about half an hour we gave up, heaved the anchor over the side and started the hazardous trek back to the shore. Not one of us even had a small cut or graze from the coral which is an absolute miracle as we were all bare foot. The platform abandoned, the RAF were pissed off to say the least and we blamed it on the coral.

We even tried walking across the causeway to the adjoining island one day but we'd only got half way across before being called back – visiting was forbidden we were told.

The islanders from around the atoll travelled by boat and none of these had engines but all had the typical lateen sail and if there was insufficient wind to blow them along then out came the most extraordinary looking oars. The shaft was reasonably thick but it was the

blade that seemed odd, it was in the shape of a stylised crown. Everyone on board these boats waved and smiled every time they came past in fact they seemed happy with their lot as they glided past either singing or chanting as the blades dug in.

As mentioned earlier I was armed with a camp bed to sleep on which was great so much so that a few of us slept on the upper deck – Cavalier didn't have the luxury of air conditioning – it was idyllic to wake in the morning and just watch the sun rise.

One such morning as I lay half dozey from sleep I hadn't heard the early morning Taxi taking people to work on Gan as it came in at about 20 feet from the ship's side and as there was hardly any breeze this was oar driven. It was as they came level with my position on the upper deck that as a man they all sank their oars in to the water and let out a collective – OOH HAH or something like that. I and Trevor Poynton shot out of our respective beds and were heading for safety of the gun deck before we realised what was happening. WE moved up a level after that just in case the locals thought that this was a good idea and highly amusing. One thing I noticed was that the helmsmen of these boats all stood up whilst steering and actually used their feet to push the tiller this even when the boats were out in a heavy swell. Great seamen those boys!!

All good things come to an end so they say and it was one morning that we were relieved by HMS Carysfort and so it was off back to the real world of being sailors.

I tried for nearly an hour to obtain a radio shut down with Gan with no success until I heard this voice from above saying that they would relay my message for me. The voice came from the Captain of a BA flight homeward bound to England from Singapore – unusual but practical because it worked.

Five days later we docked and I had to say my farewells to people who had become friends – still that was the nature of the beast and the Royal Navy at the time. I never met any of those crew members again!!!!Mmmm.

Kranji Part 2

As soon as we had docked after the entering harbour routine I was given leave to depart the ship – another leaving routine was endured only to be followed about an hour later by a joining routine back at my “home” base Kranji W/t Station.

Needless to say I was automatically put back into the watch keeping rosters and started work immediately.

The one big difference this time was that whilst I had been defending the empire the EW section had been moved to one of the accommodation blocks on the outer rim of the establishment which was no great problem so far as we were concerned as it moved us further away from any form of control that our superiors they may have over us. Not that we were destructive in any way it's just that we enjoyed what little freedom we could get.

The new block was divided into four ground floor cabins which housed just four of us but above was a large mess deck that housed a lot of people and usually those who were in transit from ship to ship. Life could not have been better if we had really tried we worked, played and generally took life head on in every aspect.

Runs Ashore

This was the lifeblood of the Royal Navy when ship borne but enjoyed just as much by us based upon land in the Stone Frigates of the time. Our temptations were greater than the seagoing boys in that if we weren't on duty we could just leave and go outside the workplace whereas the floating brigade had to wait until they were safely tied up alongside before dashing off to the local flesh pots for nights of debauchery.

There were two small towns between us and the big city of Singapore and these were Bukit Timah and Bukit Panjang where we would send out for a take away and give a taxi driver the fare and the money for the goods to be collected. The taxi drivers even selected the meals for us after a while such was the trust we had with each other.

These two towns had alongside the main highway some pretty useful bars and eateries which we frequented on many a night but especially when money was running just a bit short, as the cost of drinks and food was low. Low that is before one of the local “lovelies” came to join you at your table and you let her sit down (most of the time we did) and you were then expected to buy her a drink.

Without exception these girls would end up drinking some bright green concoction known as the “Sticky Green”, which so far as we could work out was totally non alcoholic. We didn't mind because some of the girls were just great fun to be with and I would point out were NOT on the game, so for us it was being with young people of our own age group. Yeah! Yeah! I hear you say but it was true.

More often than not we would end up walking back from the main road as we'd run out of money and not many of the taxi drivers were that socially minded to offer us a free ride the couple of miles back to Kranji.

Now pay day or shortly thereafter was a whole different matter to Jolly Jack – he had money to burn and short pockets. This was the time for excess in everything, a time to ride in taxis down to Singapore, to eat the best and drink whatever came your way. We laughed, we talked and as the evenings wore on the tales of daring do became more and more exaggerated – no, they were wildly exaggerated – and the antics of some beggared belief.

Then there was Bugis Street – the most famous or infamous street in the whole of Singapore. There was in daylight hours very little to recommend it anyone, whether Jolly Jack tar or passing civilian tourists, It was run down, dirty looking and on the whole a pretty shabby place until the night fell when all of the lights from the bars came on and there were some lights on the better equipped tables which overflowed on to the roadways. This was the place to go. There were bars everywhere and cafes out on the street where you could sit, drink and eat with Chinese music blaring out of one hostelry and western pop out of the next. You couldn't see the state of the buildings nor for that matter did anyone care an awful lot especially as the night wore. There were bar girls everywhere and yes an awful lot of them were on the game and tried every trick in the book to pick up clients from amongst the huge numbers of people looking on. Most nights they succeeded I understand.



Then there were the drop dead gorgeous parades of the “Beanie Boys” – or Kai Tais as they were known – these were all transvestites which to us 20 year olds was something of a mystery as we had led a bit of a sheltered life to that point and had never heard of a transvestite before. We soon learned as the difference between a Beanie Boy and the local girls was that the BB's were the most beautiful looking people and the girls were just girls.

These BB's would parade in all of their finery before the milling throng, and yes, later in the evening some were seen getting in to taxis with some unsuspecting soul. What a learning curve there must have been.



Every so often a major fight would break out but not between the Europeans but the Chinese and on several occasions gangs of heavies brandishing every form of knife or hatchet could be seen in hot pursuit of some poor unfortunate. Boy could some of those Chinese run, seems a pity that the Olympic committees of the day didn't harness all of their power and win an armful of medals. The pursuits would be like a scene from a silent movie with people running into one building and then appearing several doors further up the street with their attackers running the opposite way. The cheers from the onlookers was legendary – nobody took it seriously enough to worry.

One night a group of us ordered a meal of some dish that had chicken in it. “No Problem” said our bar owner and went off through to the back to place the order or so we thought. Within minutes all hell broke loose with much yelling and shouting and an awful lot of squawking emanating from the back. It was at this point that a chicken shot through the bar and out on to the road and made a valiant try for freedom. Our feathered friend only made it as far as the other side of the street before being captured and returned to the kitchen in disgrace. The noises that followed didn't sound human so we carried on talking and viewing the antics of the other revellers. After about a quarter of an hour a very freshly cooked chicken dish appeared on the table served by our now beaming host – we ordered another beer to toast our late lamented feathered friend who I might add tasted pretty darned good.

The military were always in evidence and many a poor soul was hauled away by the Red Caps, Snow Drops or Shore Patrols if things got really out of hand like the “Flaming Arsehole” farting display, which could be both dangerous and highly illuminating to both the practitioner and the crowds of onlookers.

Happy Days!!!!

Thus work would always interrupt the more enjoyable parts of our life but we managed to survive until the next big run ashore.

One of the legends of that part of the world (or so he would lead you to believe) was the famous singer, songwriter and general raconteur by the name of Bill Bailey of whom the famous song was written. Well that was his story and he'd stuck to it for many a long year.

Bill Bailey after he'd been released from internment by the Japanese at the end of the second world war, had, so the tale goes wandered up to a particularly lovely old Colonial style building and taken a notice off the door and laid claim to the place.

This must have been true because when we visited it in 1960/61 he was still there happily running his night club with his best pal Johnnie Johnson.

On special occasions myself and two others by the name of Thumper Louth and Geoff Groves would travel to Singapore and after a good meal go on to the best night spot in town – “The Coconut Grove” – the very one owned and run by the said Bill Bailey. This was almost by invitation or so it seemed because if your face didn't fit you didn't get in – end of story. Once in the CG there were three separate bars to relax in and a dance floor to use if you were so minded – we did on occasion go berserk and dance with any of the girls who were in there subject to their partner saying yes. All ladies had to be accompanied in, who they left with was their business and no questions asked. Most of the ladies were European and either serving in the forces or wives of serving personnel and the balance were to a man (woman) Chinese and damned good looking at that. Drop dead gorgeous is probably a much better description. We all had a new” partner” or so on occasion, and why not we asked ourselves. We were young and the world was to be enjoyed. We enjoyed everything we could except – Drugs, drugs were to the Navy a big, big no no. Mind you with everything else going on we'd no time left to start out on the snorting trail.

If you were lucky and on a good night Bill would come out from his place by the bar and play his guitar and sing to the masses way in to the wee small hours of the morning. Bill liked a drink or two/three/four and so the times of him entertaining became less, mores the pity.

The atmosphere in the CG was fabulous, the whole place had an intimate air even though you went in to the place as a single male it just seemed right. Funnily enough the dress for this place was, smart casual, to use the modern parlance but we seemed to get away with wearing almost as we pleased any combination of attire. We were however never scruffy.

We'd leave at some unearthly hour feeling at ease with the world and his uncle but I can still to this day remember a very sobering sight and that was just outside the main doors people were sleeping on rush mats on the dirty pavement or on very rickety beds. These people were it turned out – The Night Watchmen – all were big men and if anyone had the courage to step over them then you were braver than me.. We had just left affluence by comparison.

These sights became so common as to finally have no effect on your conscience as we weren't there to save the world – we OWNED IT according to the pink bits on the atlas and therefore we were superior. The Navy never did feel that way as Jolly Jack would make friends with anybody, anywhere in the world.

On other occasions we didn't make our runs ashore to the best places in town but would end up at the Britannia Club where the beer was cheap and the food OK in other words this was our NAAFI club and it served a good purpose.

To digress one of the first things that took our eye after arriving in this far flung part of the empire was the finest piece of ladies apparel – the Cheongsam dress – mostly they were made of silk in As many colours as you could imagine but the outstanding thing was that they were skin tight, had a mandarin neck but the skirts had a slit from the knee to the top of the thigh. This we hadn't seen before and based on the hormones that 20 year olds have this was heaven on legs and not something that your Mum would approve of. I still can dream of those heady days and nights and returning there some 40 years later just rekindled those happy days. The wife wasn't over impressed with my enthusiasm however , but Hey Ho!!

Back to the runs ashore – In all my life I had never eaten steak nor did I actually know what it was if the truth be known other than a cut of beef. It was in Singapore that I was first introduced to joys of steak – lots of steak . At least once per fortnight and usually around payday we would decamp to The Dolphin restaurant in Singapore and attack the main steak menu and would eat a different style/type of meat each and every visit. We became so well known by the owner and staff that we were treated like royalty whenever we went in so much so that the standard dress code was abandoned and we could have worn anything we liked.

And so it went on throughout my stay in Kranji wireless station – we lived like Kings by comparison to the rest of the navy.



H.M.S. Belfast

One fine day the whole of the E.W department was sent off to serve on a large seagoing ship, thankfully I never had to repeat the exercise from that moment on.

How people managed to mentally survive the rigours of life on board a capitol ship I will never know. Much has been written of the Belfast and most since she retired from naval service and ended up in the Port of London as a tourist attraction.

We were of course extra personnel and therefore not really welcome aboard by the crew who were living in pretty cramped conditions as it was. Our job was to monitor the fleet communications during the period of a major combined naval exercise taking place in the South China Sea with the navies of Britain, Australia, New Zealand, India, France and the Phillipines. The main Emphasis of the work was to look particularly carefully at the manner in which The Royal Navy conducted itself. This we did under sufferance but to us it was just another part of the job and not to be taken as a personal attack on anyone.

Every so often the big ships were allowed to fire their big guns in anger (well the exercise said it was for real) and after the Belfast let off a few rounds it became the turn of the Indian cruiser Mysore (this was an older ex royal navy cruiser purchased by the Indian government) to let off a few.

All started well and went to order and more importantly they didn't hit one of us, well that is until as we watched from the flag deck, a stoker aboard the M walked out on to the upper deck mopping his brow and just taking a few breaths of fresh air. Unfortunately as the stoker walked aft and very near the 6inch guns, there was a flash of light, a cloud of black smoke and a mighty bang – no stoker could be seen. The Mysore was informed but I'm not

sure what happened next as they just kept steaming in the same direction. Having said that, they didn't let off any more shells that day.

Naval exercises are very much the same no matter when they occur and this one was no exception – we played at war, we bombed, shelled carried out the usual seamanship exercises jointly with all others and at the end the powers that be got together for the wash up and declared everything a huge success.

It was now time for rest and relaxation for one and all and it was thus that all of the ship's companies were allowed ashore to let off steam on the island of Pulau Tioman – this was the island setting for the fifties musical South Pacific.

What a place the island then was, almost deserted apart from a few villagers and Fishermen, the beaches were long and unspoiled, the sea was clear and the weather perfect. Being one of the extra crew I was asked/detailed off to be the shore communications operator and so it was that I was put into a boat and ferried to shore with my radio and not much else except for a whole boatload of Tiger beer. This was one of the hardest assignments you could imagine – sun, sea, beer and no control – heaven.

My only real job was to let the ship know when the beer was running out and how was the bar- b- q meat going, as well as the football scores from the matches between the various ships and navies.



We played, football, softball and watched the Aussies put on displays of life guard Drills. We drank and ate, sang and fought – life was again idyllic.

The three weeks on board The Belfast had been illuminating but still big ships were not for me as they were too impersonal. People from aft didn't know or recognise those from amidships, bugles blared before announcements over the address systems and so it went on.

We were all glad to get back to Kranji and the off the wall life that we lived in our particular backwater of the Royal Navy.

Kranji-The Captains Inspection

As with all organisations there comes a time when the powers that be become quite formal and need to inspect their troops to find out if they are still functioning and indeed still there. I don't think that there had been an inspection of Kranji wireless station for many a long year, or it may be that I'd just missed the earlier one.

We had to clean and scrub and polish everything from our mess decks to individual Radios and equipment in daily use. We had to exercise fire drill and evacuations to make sure we knew what to do should the need arise even to the point of how the dining hall worked for all of our meals. All of this before the man even arrived on the scene. The man in question was the Captain of HMS Terror under whose direct administration we came, and he was to spend the whole day along with his staff inspecting us from every angle.

Now when there is an inspection of any body of troops this always includes the obligatory formal inspection of the men on a parade ground. Kranji W/T didn't have a parade ground basically because there were never any parades so this proved a problem until someone found that part of the perimeter road was wider in one spot as there was a lay by. This was then the chosen spot for the dais to be placed.

At this point I would say that the Royal Navy didn't have parades as they are so called in the other two armed services, our meeting of all ranks was always known as Divisions. The only problem with this sort of parade is that you have to turn out in your finest uniform that has to be immaculate in every detail right down to the very twee white shoes that we were forced to wear. No problem you might think. That is until you just knock against any object, and these are always darker than the pure white of your shoes – hence one black scuff mark standing out like a carbuncle. It is this mark that can lead to you being awarded the pleasure of a full kit muster.



“Divisions – Kranji style”

The inspection went well and the imported band played all of the right stuff. The Sun rose and the temperature rose alarmingly, everyone including the Captain, began to sweat. Uniforms looked less than pristine within a quarter of an hour but the band played on and it was time to move off at the normal Naval pace of under 100 paces per minute. It's this pace of marching that drives the military mad as they seem to charge around everywhere at an alarming pace of anything up to 120 ppm, hence the navy always marches at the front of any major inter service parade otherwise there would be enormous gaps between the RN and the others. Sergeant majors become very unhappy about that sort of thing – it looks untidy I suspect.



The marching on that day was at best adequate as we could see the imported GI going redder by the minute as we marched past at our own sort of shuffle. There were only about 100 souls serving in Kranji so the march past wasn't to take too long – that is until the cooks were formed up ready for the off. Now the cooks were all Hong Kong Chinese and they didn't have a great command of the English language, so the yelling by the GI wasn't having any greater effect other than to scare the living daylights out of the poor blighters. It was at this point that the "parade ground" was clear of everyone except them and a very uneasy looking OIC, and all eyes were turned towards the remaining unfortunates. The senior Cook was a Leading Hand who could speak English quite well and so he attempted to take charge of his merry band of men. All of them to a man were short, but some were skinny and one or two others completely round and not one of their uniforms fitted nor indeed was it complete. Things like black silk was missing or a lanyard hadn't been put on. They all wore borrowed caps so I leave that part to your imagination. With much yelling and bobbing of heads the motley crew aimed themselves towards the waiting dignitaries and if they'd yelled Banzai as the virtually galloped passed I wouldn't have been in the least bit surprised.

By this time the whole matter of divisions was in total disarray and not a soul was able to keep from laughing even the Captain had a smile on his face as he took the final salute. I think we got off lightly that day but having said that the communications branch was always the least military in its ways and many a GI has been seen walking off from a bunch of sparkers or flag wagers muttering unintelligible things under his breath. Crying probably if the truth be known.

It was sad really as we had cleaned and scrubbed, dusted and polished everything that didn't move of its own accord to the point that all looked less used than was actually real – including ourselves.

Life at Kranji was unreal we almost did as we pleased when off duty but worked to the limit when carrying out our normal duties. I don't think that I will ever be able to forget the place nor so far as I can ascertain will a lot of others....

The People

Kranji had more than its fair share of some of the weirdest but people who had the biggest egos, oddest character makeup and the funniest ,friendliest bunch to be assembled in one place that I've ever come across. Perhaps I was just downright lucky and others have not been able to find such a mix of comedians anywhere in the world.

Our section was by nature of the work that we carried out was the smallest on the Station but somehow God had assembled some of the wackiest. Perkins was married and had an accompanied draft with his family as was Barton so they were under certain constraints from their own particular management Team.

Way out in front was a guy called Thumper Louth who was a wild man if ever there was one. He sported a beard, liked folk music and played a guitar. His tattoos were quite a sight as they had been acquired from many places around the globe and were of a myriad of styles. Thumper liked a glass or two of the alcoholic beverages and soon became a great soul mate and mentor – he was also great at his job in the EWO.

Bevan was a quieter type as was Williams but I think they were very Welsh so only livened up after a jar or two or when the choir struck up. The two Thompsons were great fun with one of them playing for one of the local civilian cricket teams as well as being an aficionado on the wooden xylophone, of which there is more later.

Then as before mentioned there were the Aussies – Hm!!!!!!!!!!!!

Friendships were formed all around with the general boys and ourselves all mixing in together it made for quite a wild gathering.

Two of the guys were GAY, not closet gays but in ya face right up front the full monty. One named Stanley was rather more butch than the other but loved his makeup set and would often be seen sitting in front of his makeup mirror applying the full facial feminine stuff. We all looked on totally entranced at seeing a man apply lipstick and eye shadow.

Sandy on the other hand was the more female of the two and just downright bitchy on occasion. The two of them acted just like an old married couple much to the great amusement of us straight guys.

The powers that be were not at all happy with the situation and warnings were given to our two love birds to pack in the Gay bit. So much so that Stanley was packed off to sea on a loan draft for some three months all on his own. Sandy went down the committing suicide route, well at least trying to with absolutely no success whatsoever.

I think the last straw was when our blond couple went on R and R to Penang and returned some 14 days later sporting flowing manes of jet black locks and calling each other names like Ricky – they'd both fallen for Ricky Nelson the then rock idol. Both were sent back to England and discharged from the Navy – two silly characters had gone forever.

Candy Campbell loved everything American from dress to softball and his big “Oppo” (navy slang for best mate pal or buddy and actually meant opposite number) was a man called Ed Beauchamps – pronounced bowchamps and not Beecham as it would have been in England.

Ed was an American computer wizard who had been seconded to the RN to convert the communications systems from gas to electronic, and he had been given the honorary rank of Lieutenant commander. Ed was not a man who liked pomp and so decided that he would not live in the wardroom with the serving officers so had booked into the most famous hotel in the world - Raffles. On the basis that Ed was larger than life in his outlook it came as no surprise when, after a few weeks of luxury, he returned to Kranji looking a bit forlorn and down at mouth.

Ed it seems had during a reasonably heavy drinking session with his chums that included Candy Campbell and your truly, he had taken to one of the first floor landings and turned it into a mini softball arena. Several of the other patrons of the hotel had taken to their rooms and wouldn't emerge for fear of being hit by the softball (Hard when it hits you) that was being thrown from one end of the landing to the other. At the time it was a lot of fun but the staff were not so amused as could be seen on the faces of some of the Sikh doormen who'd been despatched to put a stop to the revelries. Ed was invited to leave forthwith. So were we as non paying guests.

Living on the same quarters as Candy was a real bull-necked Aussie radio operator who was on secondment from his navy to ours. Now this guy was all muscle and hair and didn't have much of a neck to speak of – rather like some of the modern rugby players – but he was as brash and loud as any of his countrymen that you will come across.

Every so often he would ask Candy or one of us if we would mind using his razor blades just once before he did as new ones tended to rip his cheeks to pieces. We all naturally obliged him with his odd request and whilst we found it peculiar didn't take much notice. We were just a bunch of men living in a strange country and place. This practice went on for some time until one night he returned on board (naval terminology again) escorted by one of his mates. It was obvious that he'd been in one hell of a scrap by the bruises and scratches all over his face and body.

Our razor lending chum turned out to be Gay and had that night ventured into a bar used mainly by Royal Marines and tried to pick up a pal for the evening. The Royals had taken great exception to his actions and had supplied their own remedy – they beat him up. What was both the saddest and perhaps funny part of this whole saga was that they, the RM's, had accused him of being too ugly and that's why he was ousted.

Pity about the razor usage as most of us felt just a little on the odd used side. He too, left Kranji not long thereafter, destined we know not where. I hope he made it.

Williams had one of the whitest skins I have ever seen, he didn't venture out into the sunlight unless it was absolutely necessary and so spent his entire time in the far east either on duty, eating or sleeping. He hardly ever went ashore or stopped in the canteen for a drink. To use his words – “ I hate the far east and just want to get back home as soon as possible I never did work out how staying in bed solved that problem but he was happy being miserable and I don't remember his leaving – perhaps I was away. One morning there was a lot of activity around the MAA office at around 0800 this being the time that most people should, if on night leave, have returned to the fold and checked in so that everyone knew where they were. On this particular day one of our merry band had not returned – his name escapes me – but news was coming from Kranji village that there was a dead European. Off went MAA along with a rating from a missing persons mess to look into the matter. Half an hour later two ashen faced people returned and headed for the rum store. Now I would point out that this was not normal or usual Naval procedure to head for the on board bar at about 0930. Today was just a bit different.

The dead European was indeed the missing rating unfortunately the only way that he could be identified was by the tattoos on the remains as he'd apparently been seen somewhat the worse for wear the night before as he headed back on board. It would appear that he'd been hit by the train heading north into Malaya but it hadn't stopped, and more than likely not been seen by the driver. Our unfortunate was in several pieces when discovered and the two guys who carried out the identification were to say the least in a state of shock when they came back hence they were both given a double tot of Naval rum and sent off to bed for the rest of the day.

It seemed to work because the next day was as if nothing had happened and whilst mentioned in general conversation the events of the day before were now history.

Hoyle was one of the oddballs, he was dark skinned in any event but always wore the lightest clothes to show off his tan. Hoyle loved the ladies but couldn't quite get used to the idea that not all of the ladies loved him and so his pursuing of the fairer sex was relentless. As the story goes he actually caught one once.

I've still got a set of his shoe cleaning brushes which I use to this day. I wonder how he got on with a kit muster with those missing and I wonder how I would have fared with a kit muster with shoe brushes with his name stamped on the side of them. Suspect I could have been in some sort of trouble actually. Hey Ho!!!

A load of BALLS

A short time after I reached Kranji an event occurred that makes the eyes water of even the hardiest of men.

The tale begins with a group of sailors from Kranji being taken off to the main base at HMS Terror to take part in a gunnery exercise on the local .303 range or butts hoping to become more proficient in the art of rifle shooting (communicators occasionally had these flights of fancy). After the shooting was over and all were packing up the gear before returning rifles to the armoury, one soul noticed that the red warning flag was still flying at the top of the mast. Now this particular chap was very gung ho even before anyone knew what gung ho was, and immediately sprang forward saying he would haul down flag Bravo (always flag bravo for missile firing).

The flag was actually stuck and so our fearless hero immediately wrapped himself around the mast and shinned to the top, freed the halyard grabbed the flag and slid down the mast. Now as any would be communicator knows halyards are always secured around and to a brass cleat which has a spike at both top and bottom. Our man had forgotten this it seems and when he found himself impaled and hanging from the lower part of the mast he had nowhere to go.

It is really only in Bolting Brothers movies where something like this happens and is deemed to be amusing. Unfortunately for our pal everyone found it amusing and he was left hanging there by his manhood for some minutes before his howls of pain were taken seriously.

The result was that our man was taken off to the sickbay and stitched up and put back together again – he soon gained the name of Tex.

It was about a week later that when on watch in the wireless office that an odd odour was detected and it soon became apparent that it came from our chum. Well after much sniffing and prodding our man was led away to the sickbay for a further inspection of his crown jewels and unfortunately a further operation was deemed necessary with the result that a testicle was to be removed. Things go off very quickly in the tropics and this was to be no exception.

Fortunately our chum already was the father of three children as he was advised that further increasing the population of the world would not be in his domain. I still wince when I think of that day (it was still funny though).

Warrior Training

We were technically at war with Indonesia and so their Lordships in their wisdom decided that all naval personnel should undergo weapons training. What they had failed to grasp was that communicators in general didn't consider themselves to be of a military background and so that anything other than signals and ciphers were not all that interesting.

It was announced that the Chief GI from HMS Terror was to attend at Kranji Wireless station with the sole intention of teaching us how to use GUNS. The local gardening staff were given the task of clearing what had been an old bomb shelter of years of growth of bamboo, vines, grass and of course our friendly cobras and their mates. They weren't too happy but a magnificent job was done and nobody got bitten for a change.

The day of the shootout came and we were assembled in front trestle tables upon which was laid six army issue canvass holsters, boxes of bullets and of course six Webley .38 revolvers. We leapt forward as one eager to get our hands on the nearest thing to a western six gun that we had ever seen. The Chief GI screamed and we stopped as one not daring to move an eyelash and waited whilst we were given full instructions on how to strap on the equipment how to load and wait until the go ahead was announced for us to fire. "Nobody is to fire at the target until the range is clear and the go ahead is given by me to start shooting". BANG the first shot was immediately fired. "Who said you could.....". The rest of the sentence was lost as six manic radio operators opened up at the targets in front of them. I was the only one to hit anything and that was the elbow of the would be assailant.

One odd feature about the targets was that whilst they were all plywood cut outs of an advancing soldier, the figures all wore German uniforms. Strange really bearing in mind that we were situated in the Far East. Probably the targets were standard Admiralty Targets Pattern German for the Shooting at. The rest of the morning didn't really improve a lot as nobody took the whole exercise very seriously and I'm sure that the Chief developed a tic in his cheek rather like that of Herbert Lom in the Pink Panther films.

Flora & Fauna

As soon as you turned off the main highway to Johore Bahru, crossed the railway line at Kranji village we were taken into a different world. No longer were we in the modern 20th century, 1960's with all of its hustle and bustle, we had turned back the clock 50 to a 100 years. The little road leading to the wireless station curved up through what was then neat jungle with banana trees closest to the road and much bigger trees with hanging moss behind them. The whole effect was that sound became deadened – no one hears you scream in space comes to mind – and the pace slowed to a crawl. Even the dockyard police on the main gate were completely laid back as they waived our five ton truck through with us sat forlornly looking out over the tail gate and wondering what the hell were we doing here.

Everywhere we looked there were jacaranda trees some in bloom others not, Palms, bushes, clumps of bamboos and spinyfex grass on every piece of open ground. Stretching for as far as we could see was the 12 feet high angle iron security fence. Then there was the jungle beyond the six foot walk way that was patrolled all of the time by the police.

Apart from the green stuff there was the temperature and the humidity which enveloped you in great soggy swathes. Apart from sports activities this was the place where I learned how to sweat. Buckets of it all day long unless you were on duty in the air conditioned wireless office. We showered at least twice per day and changed clothes with

great regularity until after about six months when you finally became accustomed to the whole environment.

One thing that didn't acclimatise was leather boots and shoes (this is where I get back to the flora and fauna) all of a sudden upon waking up one morning we found that our footwear was completely covered in a white/green mould.

Great attacks with every conceivable cleaning material was used to combat the peril of the white/green growing fur but the only thing that worked an absolute treat was KIWI black shoe polish. Lord knows what was in it but the furry stuff gave up quite quickly and order was restored.

One of the scariest creatures that we came across or rather it came across us was a large green lizard which had the frightening habit of dropping from the top of one of the palm trees which grew alongside the path from the office to the main buildings. This feat usually happened at night when you were feeling quite mellow and at ease with the world and walking slowly along to the canteen. This damned creature would drop at least twenty feet before crashing into the small bushes around the base of the palm tree before scurrying of into the undergrowth. By this time most of us would have jumped nearly as high as the lizard had fallen and our heart rate would have doubled. Don't believe it when you see James Bond take these moments of near panic in his stride – it doesn't happen like that.

Snakes were always a creature to look out for whether they were harmless or not as we hadn't a clue as which ones bit or those that squashed so we took the line of least resistance – we avoided them like the plague so far as we were able. Avoiding snakes is usually quite easy because they slide off rather than confront unless they are threatened. However there are times when the choices of avoidance are taken away from you.

One Saturday morning we found ourselves with yet another camp inspection, by whom I'm not quite sure, but suffice it to say that we had to clean and polish everything, even the tins of polish were polished it was that bad. As there were only three of us ready and able to work on our mess we decided that it would be a good idea for us all to get inside our room and move all of the furniture.

Great plan we thought so beds were stacked one on top of the other and pictures taken down off shelves so that we could attack with gusto. We scrubbed and polished as much as we could until the only thing left was to move the big aluminium lockers to enable us to burnish the floors. As these lockers were full of our kit they weighed a ton and took all of our efforts to shift them.

However move them we did and pushed them over towards the door. It was at this point that we noticed that there was a fourth in the room and it did not look happy – I'm not sure that snakes have a happy face at any time, but this one was looking and acting as if highly pissed off about something. Mrs Cobra was swaying back and forth and hissing a lot, we on the other hand were looking for an exit only to see that this was blocked on the one hand by beds and lockers and on the other by our snake in front of the window.

It does not take a lot of imagination to picture three hairy arsed sailors standing on top of metal lockers wearing just UPs and flip flops all in a state of near panic. Being members of the senior service we were not to be out done by a wriggly and so proceeded to

throw anything that was loose out our scaly intruder who after being hit on the side of the head by a well aimed tin of Brasso suddenly took off and virtually fell down the hole in the wall through which she had slithered. As a man we lurched forward pushing a locker across the floor scratching it dreadfully and managed to crash it securely against the wall. Just before we hit we could see Mrs Cobra and what looked several junior cobras wriggling around under the building. Obviously they didn't like inspection day any more that we did.

The decks in our mess were all black painted for some odd reason but that peculiarity saved the day because we managed to hide the deep gauges with the before mentioned KIWI polish, black, boots for the cleaning of.

Several well placed rush mats also helped in the deception and so we got away with it yet again even though we were still making up the beds whilst the inspection team were only two or three rooms away.

Nobody quite believed our tale of the cobra, which is interesting, because nobody wanted to look under the building or behind our lockers to disprove our tale of daring do!!!!!!!!!!!!

Fortune Favours the Brave.

Two or three times gardeners were bitten by a snakes and it was usually a Cobra so the poor unfortunate was rushed to the sick bay. To my knowledge there were no fatalities thankfully. We saw other snakes on a fairly regular basis but they didn't harm us so we didn't go anywhere near them – the status quo was nicely established that is until the night of the picture house. We must have been broke or the film excellent but in any event several of us decamped to the station cinema for the evening and after the show we as one decided to turn in rather than do the flesh pots of the canteen.

Now Kranji was not big on street lights and had one overhead light every 100yards or so thus the walk back at 2200 was just a bit dark – you have to remember that the days and nights on the equator are just about equal in length with sunset being at around 1900 – so we set off just jabbering away as a bunch of young lads might do. About halfway to our mess we were suddenly overtaken by a demented soul who was running as if pursued by the devil herself and yelling at the top of his voice as he hammered past. SNAAAAAAAKE was all that we could make out as he disappeared around the bend in the road. We looked around for the danger point and there it was some 20 feet back from where we had just walked – a Python stretched across the whole width of the road. We had all stepped over the snake and not one of us had noticed it as we all chatted away.

At this stage we all felt pretty damned smug about a snake that was so far away but we hastened our steps just to be on the safe side.

The one creature that I will not spend much time talking about is a spider, just to say that we saw some pretty humungous red hairy varieties during my time in Singapore and do not wish to repeat the exercise. I HATE SPIDERS.

For three or four nights we were kept awake by the loudest, frog croaking that you can imagine, in fact it sounded more like a short fog horn going off. It almost boomed every

couple of minutes and this in the end set off the great Frog hunt by as many people as could be rounded up. We were all feeling quite Brave/silly having decided over a glass or two of Tiger that we would deal with the fog horn once and for all. So it was on the way back from the bar to our mess along the almost completely dark road that we heard the first boom.

It came from any area of thick grass and bamboo and so in we charged with absolutely no regard to whether the place was infested with snakes, spiders or any other creature that was out to kill you. Luckily, one guy had the presence of mind to bring with him a torch.

Quickly the area of the noise was located – a manhole – somehow we managed to prise the lid off and there inside the manhole and clinging to the Brickwork was the culprit – the tiniest green frog about half an inch long with the loudest croak of all time, so you can forget the ubiquitous Bull Frog our man was the best. He was captured and turned out to graze and peace returned to Kranji Wireless Station for the time being. Perhaps we had done the worst thing ever for the frog in that he was promptly eaten by a natural predator or maybe not.

The peace was of course short lived as there was the sound of the jungle creatures all of the time.

Donk Donk birds were the bane of everyone's life. These birds perched on top of telegraph poles, at the tops of trees and even on the eaves of buildings and then for hours their call of, yes you've guessed it – Donk Donk would reverberate around the station. These birds whose actual name I haven't a clue didn't hold back in the volume department they just went on and on and on donking away.

One thing I noticed about Kranji was the lack of flies.

At various times we would have radio operators and tactical operators billeted with us whilst they attended advancement courses at the STC and they would stay for two to three weeks before returning to their ships. One particular occasion resulted in there being a Maori radio operator from one of the KIWI ships staying with us. We'd all turned in after a farewell drink or two with this guy and slept well that is until about seven the next day when we were awakened by a lot of yelling and scrabbling about. Our Maori chum was pointing to his UP's and the sheet on his bed – there was a lot of blood to be seen. The Maori was quite obviously distressed as he couldn't find out what part of him was bleeding and his demeanour wasn't helped when we started laughing and pointing up over his head. There on top of his mosquito net was the remains of a Bat that had quite obviously flown into the huge overhead fans and the poor creature had deposited the red stuff all over our mate. Lot of blood for something so small.



HMS Caprice

Another pier head jump came upon me without the slightest warning and there I was packing slightly more than a steaming kit this time as it was winter where we being sent this time – Australia. Farewells were said and off I went in the trusty dark blue five tonner down to the dockyard.

As soon as we arrived at the jetty I could see that the ship had a full head of steam up and that the activity on board was that of sailors preparing to cast off.

That's pretty much what happened. Another joining routine was endured but this time hammocks were issued before I was sent to the forward mess deck to settle in.



The Caprice nearest and The Cavalier

The Caprice was the first of the CA destroyers to have been modified and fitted with an enclosed bridge. What luxury!!!! What a boon that was to be and soon to be found out by all who served on the bridge.

Our course was set to take us through the famous Sunda Strait, famous that is for three things. Firstly it was a haven for pirates and had been for centuries, secondly The WW 2 battle between the Japanese navy and a combined fleet of American, Australian and Dutch ships and lastly it was home to Krakatoa or what was left after the mighty eruption of the 1800's.

On the basis that we as a nation weren't on particularly good and friendly terms with Indonesia it was a fairly strange route to send us on, or was it. That's where my department came in to its own – The interception of military signals. Our task was to pick up the Morse transmissions from localised Indonesian Army units as we approached the Strait and for as long as we could after passing through to the Indian Ocean.

Indon Army units call signs started with 24 and then three letters. Now the Electronic Warfare Office on a small destroyer is not all that big and can accommodate three people if they sit in front of the equipment. No problem you would think – another Chief, a Yeoman this time, had commandeered this little office and used it as his own sleeping cabin and continued to do so even though we were supposed to be working. He laid out his camp bed which took up two thirds of the deck space available and turned in. We were expected to be quiet and to work in the dark with only the lights from the radio sets to enable us to see what we were writing down.

Fortunately the door to the office was of the sliding variety and could crash against the end stops if set off with a bit of enthusiasm. As we changed watch the door banged, if we wanted the heads (loo) the door banged, when the night time coffee was brought round the door banged. During the watches the ship could roll a bit which meant that we could kick the CY's camp bed to stop ourselves sliding around. He lasted a day and a half before he moved back to the chief's mess, much to their annoyance as I don't think he was one of the most popular crew members on board.

After three days the signal strength of our target began to fade dramatically and so it was back to working in the main wireless office and reverting back to being radio operators in the normal sense. By this time we had crossed the Timor Sea and then the Arafura Sea onwards in to the legendary Coral Sea before heading off onto the mighty Pacific Ocean. Our destination – Sydney – the city of the big bridge and even bigger ego's.

I must say that I hadn't heard of the Sydney opera house so that when shown his edifice by a very friendly local I must say that after the initial shock I was quite blown away by the sheer size and magnificence of it. At that stage it was far from being finished and in the state now enjoyed by all. One of the abiding memories of Australia and Adelaide and one that I find hard to forget is the bars and what they looked like. Nearly all were soulless places and in many cases we found that they were just a room that had been white tiled from floor to ceiling. It was only later that you could appreciate why when you saw how the men drank and what went on from there. It was also the first time that I'd come across the petrol pump way of pulling a drink, now you see it all of the time in any pub in England and is used to dispense soft mixers.

One evening we walked into a bar at around 4.45 and the barman was pouring lager into a mass of small glasses that were lined up all over and along the bar. All was soon revealed when a rush of people came in literally just after 17.00 and walked up to the bar and started drinking and downing as many of these small glasses of beer – middies and schooners as they were called – but no money changed hands at all. Some of the men placed a pile of notes on the bar and the barman just helped himself to the money when the guy was about to leave. Everyone seemed happy with the arrangement and as there were no arguments the system obviously worked to everyone's satisfaction. Very early on in our visit we met up with this one business man who liked our company and took two of us under his wing so to speak and showed us around the town and introduced us to all his mates and acquaintances. We were taken to the inner sanctum of the Sydney cricket ground- the long room which is akin to that of the same place at Lords.

One of the strangest places was the RSL club at Botany Bay. These club are rather like the British Legion equivalent in England only five times bigger and grander, well this one was. It was like a reasonably sized office block/ hotel except that there were fruit machines on every floor and in every spare piece of flooring. "Pokies" as they are known dominated every floor and room and these were played by hundreds of people all of the time. Playing the "Pokies" in Australia has become almost a national disease and was even in those days long ago, so much so that vast numbers of people are in debt and many families are in a poor state because of the men in particular who have gone straight from their workplace to the clubs on a Friday and lost all of their wages in a single night.

The building was itself magnificent and so it should have been as all profits made by the club had to be reinvested for and on behalf of its members and any monies raised could not be invested on the stock markets or other similar types of institutions.

Days passed by and we arrived in Adelaide where it was expected that I would make contact with the parents of one of our Aussie colleagues and this was achieved much to their dismay I suspect as three of us turned up to say hello and have a beer. Still duty had been done and I must say that by the time that I returned to Kranji a full report had been given to our digger chum and more importantly he was still speaking to us.

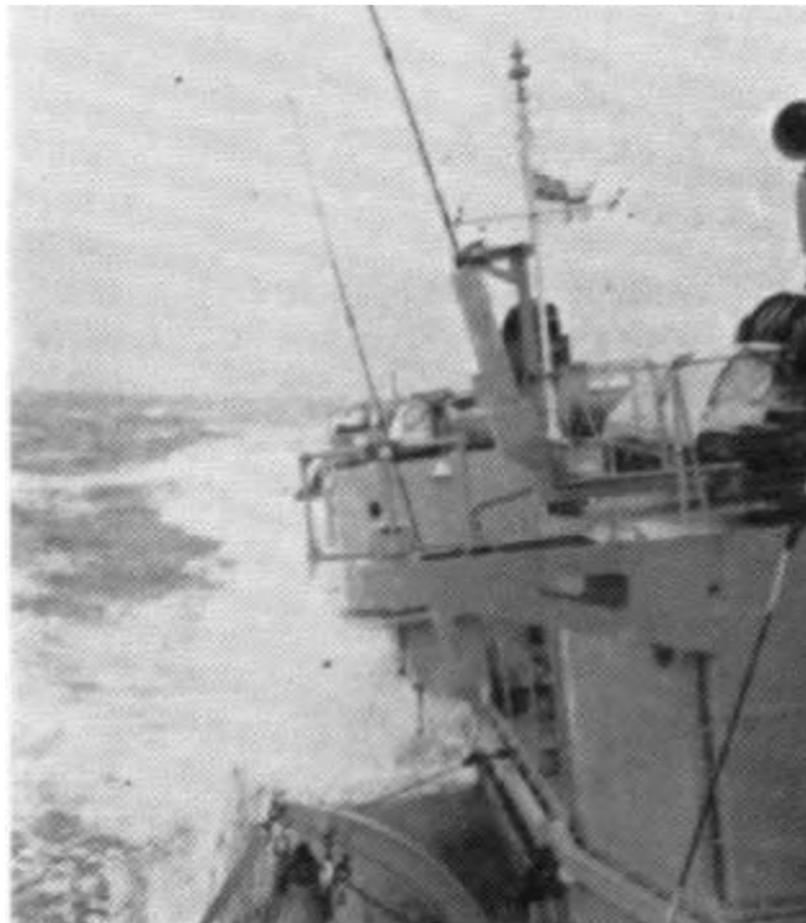
The stay in Adelaide was OK we ate out a lot and just generally took in the sights but didn't try to raise the roof. I do remember going out with some newly acquired chums for a meal at a popular night spot and it was that we took our own drinks with us. It seemed strange taking your own bottle out of a bag and then the waiter asking for money – we'd never heard of the term corkage – having said that not many of us had eaten out in restaurants before joining the navy.

It was in the fair city of Adelaide that I discovered the joys and dangers of Wine – and as the Aussies put it "wines ok when the beers' run out" – and not having ever tasted wine didn't realise it's potent power. The problem started when middies of beer were being interspersed with the same amount of wine. I don't remember leaving the bar, nor the meeting our new chum who took us home with him nor sitting in a hotel room having " a last one" before proceeding to his house. What was and is etched on my memory is the dash to the loo whilst executing a five finger spray. It went everywhere in the loo including down and over my uniform. To say the least I wasn't the best odour carrier of the month as our chum's wife pointed out in no uncertain terms as I doused myself in her perfume which she'd left in their bathroom. Hm! Perhaps I should just have forgotten that episode. We left Adelaide just

as the weather broke and we sailed out into the Southern Ocean as the mother and father of all gales struck our little flotilla of three ships head on.

Now CA destroyers are not large ships they being somewhere in the range of 2200 tons all up and you would have thought that they would have been tossed around like corks. Not so, most of the time we were taking water over the bows which meant that the ship was digging in to the waves rather than going over the top. As the Caprice had a closed in bridge it meant that we could go up there without having to venture out onto the upper deck and from there we could watch the other ships in company with us. They were crashing up, down, through and over the waves and there was some of the time when they were not even visible due to the height and troughs of the waves.

We, as said lived right up in the bows of the ship and took the brunt of every wave whether or not falling off the top or crunching through. It was at best downright miserable as it was ceaseless. The trouble with all old ships is that things start to wear when they shouldn't and the rubber sealant around the scuttles (portholes) was a case in point as some parts of it had perished on the portside forward scuttle. This meant that there was a continuous stream of water running down the side of the ship (on the inside course). The main problem was that after about four hours or so there was a considerable amount of water swilling around the deck and there was nowhere for it to discharge. Mops and buckets to the fore and water thrown down the loo!!



Hot food was a problem as this had to be collected from down aft in trays and each day different people had the dubious honour of being the duty man. One lunch time the duty fell yours truly and so off I went hanging on to anything that stuck out as the ship was still crashing around so that even the practice of walking became an adventure. Out through the main watertight doors by the break in the forecastle, scaled a straight up and down ladder, over a catwalk from where the worst of the sea crashing over the ship could be seen (like 10 feet beneath you) thence to the after gun deck and then back down another ladder.

All the time the ship was rolling from side to side and crashing up and down with huge amounts of water cascading over us as we drove in to the waves. No problem this was what we old sea salts wanted (if you believe that you'll believe anything), salt in your hair, wind in your face and a star to guide you by as I descended the ladder and being neither half way up nor halfway down I noticed that there was a large amount of water heading my way but ever so slowly. No choices left I wound myself into and around the ladder and just shut my eyes. This enormous wave swept over the port side of the ship and I was up to my waist in the wet stuff – not comfortable as the sheer force of the wave passing over nearly swept me off and I felt as if my arms were being pulled out of their sockets.

As soon as the wave had passed the door of the galley flew open and a huge hand reached out and dragged me in – “Bit damp out there mate ?” was the unsympathetic remark as I stood there dripping wet. We both laughed. The food was served in big open topped metal trays all of which were piping hot and so it was that I was unceremoniously dumped back out the pitching iron deck and the door slammed and clipped. Getting up and down ladders using both hands takes some doing, with one ARM loaded with hot metal trays makes this exercise an endurance adventure. I made it back to the mess and placed the food containers on the tables before the ravenous bleary eyed crew I must say that I've had my share of abuse in my time but the howls of derision and questioning of my parentage was something else. I couldn't help it if there was a little extra fluid in the trays – in fact they were almost half full, the food totally cold and inedible so I could see their point to a degree. We still ate it as we were starving.

None of us were getting much sleep due to the incessant and violent movement of the ship as it crashed through the waves of the Southern Ocean – they were huge and grey as was the sky above. It wasn't a nice place to be at all.

As mentioned before we slept in hammocks or on camp beds or if you were senior enough you may even have aspired to a locker bunk. No matter where you tried to kip you were thrown about unmercifully and where I managed to find a place to sling my hammock was right up against the paint store door. There was no further forward place to go. This didn't really matter as the water pouring down the sides of the ship ran straight through the hammock storage netting – hence every part of our bedding was soaked. Being hardy naval souls we just got on with it and found that after about half an hour the wet bedding actually started to warm up and so a few short hours sleep could be captured.

As said, the water was also running across the deck or rather by now was sloshing around about two or three inches deep and mixed in with it was the contents of more than one gash bucket into which was thrown tea leaves and the remnants of any meal that remained uneaten. All in all you didn't bother to look at what you were walking around in didn't make good viewing.

Having completed the middle watch I'd turned in at 0400 and immediately fallen asleep fully clothed my reverie was rudely awakened at around 0630 by the sound of many feet literally inches above my head all crashing around. The other feature was that the ship was cruising on a flat calm sea. My mate and I who both slept almost in the bows both fell out of our hammocks yelling all manner of obscenities to those above and the idiots who'd flashed up the main capstan which fired boiling steam through a crack in one of the valves directly into our beds. The rest of the mess were awakened at this point. I shall leave to the imagination the comments passed and thrown at us.

We'd arrived after three days of pounding at the beautiful little harbour town of Albany in Western Australia.

The peace and quiet after the past three days was deafening to use an oxymoron but it was such a relief to be able to stand on a non moving deck, to eat hot food and joy of joys actually be able to take a hot shower. A huge dance was laid on for us and it was up to us to meet the local dignitaries and of course being single hot blooded males it was our duty to meet and attend to the local lovely young ladies. We carried out all of our duties to the absolute end and it was only the return of various boyfriend, husbands and outraged fathers from the outback that put a bit of a downer on the visit.

Food was always dear to our hearts as the fare aboard ship, whilst wholesome and in fairly large quantities did lack just a little finesse. So it was that two or three of us found ourselves late one afternoon walking up the main street that we came upon a butchers shop that sold Australia's finest selection. Kangaroo steaks were purchased and off back to the ship we raced to employ the services of the Chinese cooks on board to cook our booty. We waited in anticipation outside the galley but the smells were almost too much to bear by the time that our Oriental chums presented us with the most exquisite plate of meat that I can remember eating. The seasoning was out of this world and the meat just dissolved in our mouths – Heaven had arrived.

All that I can say to all of the moaners and groaners who say that Roo meat is awful, go to sea in a raging storm for three days with little or no sleep get soaking wet and then meet some of the nicest girls and unhappiest boyfriends and then get some Chinese cooks to do the business – then eat a Roo steak and tell me it's not the greatest.

Albany is not called Little England for nothing – it rained and it was cold. This surprised us a bit because we'd always heard that Oz was the land of sunshine. We'd left Singapore a couple of weeks earlier in shorts and sandals and here we were in full winter kit trying to keep warm. Nonetheless the scenery was lovely looking down on the harbour from the green hills that surround.

Still it was time to go and as we left there were those on the jetty who were quite clearly upset but we'd done our duty and so waived back to them as enthusiastically as was decent.

Now to the flesh pots of Freemantle which was just around the coast and past Cape Leeuwin which again was an area of the sea that made for a lumpy ride.

Freemantle was like any other port in the world and so when two small destroyers tied up alongside it didn't cause much of a ripple. Perth on the other hand is a fantastic city and we enjoyed our stay of some five days by sampling everything on offer from rides into the outback, city tours and sport of all kinds. My one abiding memory is the view across the Swan River looking directly down from Kings Park – beautiful just about described it.

It was then up and away again bound for the town that is the farthest western point of the Australian mainland – Geraldton. On the two day trip from Perth we tuned in to the local radio station which was broadcasting to the world and his uncle exactly where we were at any time of the day. Now the Navy tends to get a bit flaky about divulging where its ships are dispersed even though I'm sure anyone could have told you where we were and our destination even as we'd left harbour.

The tale of the finger

One thing escapes me is the actual point at which I was injured, neither the time nor the place is set in my mind except for the following.

One of the duties of a radio operator was that about halfway through the morning watch he would be sent off to the boiler house armed with the huge bags of confidential waste and would stand on the huge metal plate in front of the boilers and feed the old signals into the blazing inferno thus destroying them forever. So it was that one morning the task fell to yours truly so at around 0600 I found myself peering through the small observation screen set into the top of the boiler room airlock hatch just making sure that nobody else was trying to get through at the same time as me. Should two people open the opposing doors to an airlock this has disastrous consequences – a flashback which has been known to totally incinerated anyone unfortunate enough to be stood on the footplate in front of the main boiler. So having checked the position I opened the hatch and lowered myself down to the floor closed the hatch then opened the inner door and off down the ladder to the waiting inferno. Boy was it hot.

I finished my job after about 20 minutes said my goodbyes to the senior stoker and headed up to the airlock to repeat the escape exercise. Now one of the tricks was to hang on the straight up ladder then knock the retaining handle open and grab the restraining chain to stop the hatch flying wildly open. This I managed except that it all happened in a rush and a clang. No problem I thought and bent down to pick up the empty waste bags only to see blood running down my right leg. It wasn't only running it positively gushed from around my shorts.

I couldn't for the life of me see what the problem was but decided to check that the crown jewels were still intact as the blood appeared to be coming from that general area. All was well thankfully except that there was now quite a lot of blood both on my leg, running down my hand and on to the deck in the cross passage. "Don't you f*****g well bleed all over the F*****g deck, I've only just finished cleaning the F*****g thing" was the sympathetic response to my demise from somebody on punishment duty.

It was at this point that I realised that it was one of my fingers that was the problem in that I had neatly ripped the flesh from the top segment and a pure white bone was sticking out nicely surrounded by cherry red blood and flesh. I didn't feel too good at this juncture and lurched off to the sick bay still with the moans and groans of the cleaner still ringing in my ears.

I arrived at the sick bay door and showed a waiting patient the remains of the top of my finger, he went a peculiar colour and sat down. The door opened and the SBA took one look at me with the blood running out through the gaps in my fingers (my hand was now firmly clenched I might add), down my arm and elbow and was still dripping on to the deck. "In you come sunshine" was the nicest thing I'd heard for a long time. I didn't realise that fingers when slashed to ribbons could bleed as much as this one did, the SBA and the surgeon were great. They sat me down, made me a steaming cup of hot tea and plied me with cigarettes all the time trying to get me to unclench my fingers. Finally this was achieved and I was washed, sterilised and pasteurised and then had my digit put in a splint which was then securely tied up with FIVE bandages and sent on my way.

I would add that smoking anywhere near the sick bay was an absolute NO NO so I felt somewhat privileged at the treatment that I'd received. The only problem with the injury was that it was my right hand and this made every activity known to man an absolute adventure. Trying to go to the Loo with one finger sticking straight out was different I can vouch for in no uncertain terms.

Shaving left handed whilst on the rolling deep had hazards not known to me up to that time, not least of which was when I nicked my ear with my patent safety razor. So there I was trying to take a shower with blood now trickling down my neck, whilst I had one hand held out of the water jet trying to keep the finger with the huge amounts of bandages on that were now encased in one of the navy's finest condoms, dry, and all I got from my buddies and pals was mickey taking in the extreme.

I did manage to get ashore but felt that a big bandaged finger sticking out and contrasting quite nicely with our blue/black uniform was just a bit of a passion killer so returned reasonably early and took solace in my, by now dry, hammock. After about four days it was decided that the surgeon wanted to take a look at my injury so it was back to the sick bay. Now congealed blood takes some shifting especially when dry so my hand was plunged in to a pan of hot mauve coloured liquid and the bandages removed one by one. The last one didn't want to move despite the heroic efforts of the SBA. More warm mauve stuff was brought along, only hotter this time, and back went the hand. Still no joy as my finger was now starting to hurt like hell they tried a different approach and shoved a lighted ciggie in my mouth. I should have been alerted that this was not normal practice because as I took a mighty drag on the fag one of them grabbed my arm and the other wrenched the bandage off. I passed out.

The pleasing point about this saga was that I was to keep my finger and was sent away sporting a mauve, yellow, reddish blue finger that was the gruesome envy of the whole mess. Fame at last!!!!!!

Geraldton

Nobody had warned us or even given us any information about our last port of call in the antipodes, so it was with some awe and amazement that we approached the main oiling jetty at Geraldton we were greeted by the skirl of the pipes. Yes, on the jetty was a full Scottish/Australian pipe band giving it large as we came alongside. I still can't get over this sight as it was to say the least unexpected, but we learned later that the majority of the population had a lot of Scottish ancestry.

As said we parked at the end of the main oiling jetty under the shadow of huge oil tanks so as usual we were miles from anywhere. This little town was and still is famous for its sheep industry but principally the Crayfish boats and associated infrastructure are world renowned. Now it must have been in the middle of the fishing season that our visit took place as every member of the ships company when returning on board came armed with a crayfish given by some hospitable soul. By day three some of these crustaceans started to get just a touch on the ripe side as believe it or not there are only so many meals containing crayfish that one person can eat. Many dead crayfish were re consigned to the deep under the cover of darkness as our we didn't want to offend our benefactors.

One evening we tried out the bars and flesh pots of the area and after half an hour the whole lot had been visited and just as two of us were going to on board we met up with a bunch of guys who said they were going hunting and would we like to go along. Many people who have seen the film "Crocodile Dundee" will remember the scene when a bunch of city slickers chased in to the bush in 4 X 4 trucks and blazed away at anything that moved. Well this was only different in that these guys were all locals but had been imbibing the amber nectar for most of the afternoon I would estimate.

Off we went in the back of a Ute driven by Mad Max and headed to the outback which didn't take long, whereupon hand held searchlights were turned on . Anything caught in the beams was promptly shot at by these gun toting idiots and one of them hit a kangaroo that fell behind a large scrub bush. Off went the mighty white hunter yelling "I've got the bastard" only to come tearing back from behind the bush being pursued by a seriously hacked off kangaroo that had only been wounded. Now to be cornered by an angry kangaroo is one of the worst things that can happen to you especially if they can pin you to a tree, because it is then that they use their hopping legs to disembowel their prey.

Our digger friend made back in to the Ute with inches to spare – the kangaroo was mercifully shot dead and loaded into the back along with us. Blooded at last.

One rabbit got caught in the beam of light and as most do just sat there mesmerised by the light. Out of the back dived another madman who ran the fifty or so yards to where the rabbit was and promptly picked it up by its ears holding it out yelling "It's mine". It was at this point that all eyes and guns were focused upon the unsuspecting rabbit. As one all of the guns (6 I think) fired and as the smoke cleared all we could see was a very shaky looking individual standing all alone holding what was left of one rabbit - A pair of ears. " You stupid bastards you could've killed me " still rings in my ears to this day. Congratulatory beers (tinnies) were handed out to one and all and it was back to town.

The following evening two of us were again returning to the ship when a car drew up alongside us – a Ford Fairlane two coloured American job – and the happy youngsters of about the same age as us invited us to a party. No second offer was needed so in we plunged on top of at least six others. We drove and drove until at last we arrived at the party. Now this bash was being held in a house that was built on a slope and had huge timbers supporting it. I didn't feel too confident as I walked in but the party was in full swing so any doubts were soon dispelled especially when I was directed through the dining room to get a beer.

The dining room was devoid of any furniture except for piles of cushions upon which to sit, fall or walk on.

The big feature that caught your eyes as you entered the room, apart from the noise of the music, the smell of cigarette smoke and bodies generally was nothing vaguely human. It was the huge mountain of chips laying upon a vast expanse of old newspapers in the middle of the room with people just reaching out and taking a handful before downing the same with a swig of the amber nectar. I'm not sure to this day whether they were just plain old fashioned chips or was there something more sinister lurking in their midst. Let's put it this way I'm still here to tell the tale of the house on stilts. As the night wore on the beers were going just as quickly and it was that as I stood by the kitchen door one of the Bruce's sidled up to me and said out of the corner of his mouth "Wanna nuther drink mate". Well not wanting to be churlish I responded in a like manner out of the side of my mouth "You betcha clobber" at which a glass of something odd was placed in my hand "Get it downya quick before the others spot it" was the order from the side of Bruce's mouth. I took a mighty swig of the orange – purple brew and promptly sprayed the whole lot up the side of the kitchen wall and onto the ceiling. It was neat meths with a touch of orange juice for colour. My mouth was burned raw but luckily I'd not swallowed any as who knows what state I'd have been in.

Three days later out on the rolling deep some of the taste buds began to work again which considering the state of the food wasn't all that helpful.

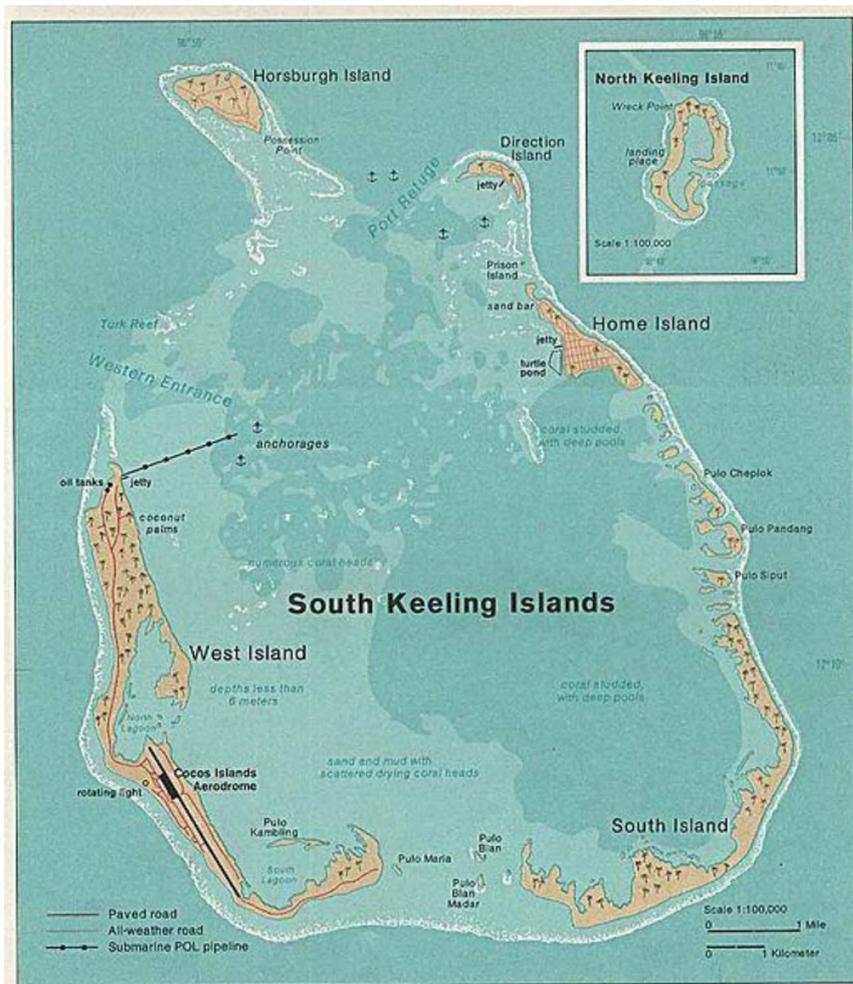
The food served up was getting worse with the bread going quite green with the mould all over the outside which after you'd cut this back with the mess bread knife the individual slices were at best half the normal size that you'd expect. It was back to tinned milk which is only just about digestible in coffee how anyone could drink tea with this gruesome tinned cow juice in I still cannot figure out.

During one forenoon there was an awful row going on with assorted Chiefs and Officers all taking statements and throwing around accusations in every direction. Someone during the night had broken into the potato locker and thrown overboard the entire contents. The spuds had been going off for some time and one of the crew had finally had enough, down had come the red mist and out went the grey sludgy stuff. Not too difficult in some ways as the lockers were on the upper deck and open to the elements (remember the three day storm). The way that the senior rates carried on it was like a re-enactment of the "Caine Mutiny". I suppose that the RN always considered food as being sacrosanct and that for any man to interfere with anyone else's was a crime against humanity. The principle of the matter being that if a man had insufficient to eat he couldn't do his job properly – or am I being just a bit cynical ???

No one ever owned up to the captain but the crew knew exactly who the saviour was and cheered his every action. The food was still crap but at least there were no more manky spuds nor bread for that matter.

Thinking back I have just remembered that almost as soon as we arrived in Australia people were seen dashing down the gangway with buckets, fannies and jugs only to return shortly with a smug look on their faces. Milk – fresh milk - had been found and we almost bathed in the stuff. It's funny the sort of thing that was missed by almost everyone. The problem was that having had to put up with condensed milk for so long it took a day or so to readjust to the taste and also that milk goes off pretty darned quickly.

The Cocos Islands



So it was that we left the shores of a country where people had been more than friendly and hospitable and set sail for Singapore and for me a return to Kranji W/T.

A signal was received that there had been unrest and near mutiny on a tiny group of islands in the Indian ocean, by some of the Tamil workers and we as the nearest “big nation gunboat” were being sent to quell the uprising. Glory at last with at least a medal to be won was the buzz. The Cocos (Keeling) Islands are not what you would call the most outstanding

point on the globe as they are all about 10 feet above the ocean sea level, but nonetheless the lagoon and the swaying palm trees makes for one of those idyllic views normally seen on romantic movies. The life story of the Clunies is well documented so I will not expand on it at this juncture.

We really didn't stay long just time enough for our boats to be sent away and return in no time at all with about 20 of the protesters. As they came aboard they were all smiles and the friendliest of souls. We had no axe to grind with these guys as they were civilians and absolutely no threat to us or the military.

The aft gun deck had been set up with a huge canvass awning over the top of it to stop these people roasting in the mid day sun. Camp beds were the order of the day with heaps of sheets and blankets. These men were allowed their own style of food and some went down to the galley to show our on board cooks exactly what they wanted (and received). It was so that they stayed on the gun deck for the next three days until we arrived back in Singapore roads whereupon a boat came alongside and took these men off and I believe they were just dumped on the quayside to make their way home to their families.

Entering harbour routine was now the order of the day and this time they caught me so I had to turn out with the rest of the crew – damn and blast it.

Just as we came to turn in to the main berths at the naval dockyard up went the decommissioning pennant to let all and sundry know that the ship was to pay off. Everyone both ashore and afloat was quite taken with the 100 foot pennant that streamed from the masthead and salutes were exchanged all around. It was at this point that the on deck loudspeakers were switched on and the sound of Rolf Harris singing "Tie me kangaroo down sport" boomed out all round the dockyard. People stopped mid step and just stared in disbelief, it is rumoured that FO2FES nearly spilled his pink gin at this blatant disregard for naval protocol.

On the blind side of the ship (or what we thought was the blindside) we all started to sing and dance along to the music – you would not believe the bollocking we all got as apparently the Captains house was on our side of the ship and of course we hadn't noticed that. The Captain and FO2FES, who'd apparently been visiting him that particular day, saw it all and didn't see the funny side of it at all.

When we got back to Kranji W/T our exploits had been well documented and our notoriety had preceded us. Yet again I was in the poo. So another great trip was over and again after many weeks with the crew of a great ship it was time for me to pack up my steaming kit and head back to my normal duties.

As I've said before the MEKON on the Cardigan Bay did me the greatest of favours by having me drafted ashore – I visited some pretty spectacular places whilst in the Far East and met some of the nicest people.

Kranji W/T was believe it or not a welcome sight in many ways as most of my main buddies were there as was the work that I enjoyed the most – Morse Intercept. It was the challenge of accurately recording every signal sent by the opposing forces that attracted me most I think. It was as if you were outwitting the enemy all of the time even though you couldn't see them what you could do was hear them.

Greeted by all old buddies and pals and yet another round of runs ashore and the odd libation or two and it was that another Christmas came and went. Oddly enough I didn't miss the true English Christmas celebrations one little bit. Probably because those at home were not very happy occasions that I can recall.

Kranji – the final days

My last six weeks at Kranji were by way of a relief and an award for hard work. In other words I was almost ordered to take a holiday away from my normal duties and was given the job of jobs. I became the camp Posited. Now this was a position that was lusted after by many as you effectively became your own boss.

My job was to sell stamps and stationary to the camp, buy postal orders for those that wanted the same and keep a tight rein on the float. Never quite managed to do that and was always having to top it up with my own cash. I did warn the powers that be that I was the worst person in the world to keep cash or add it up and generally run this side of the business.

Every day I had to wear whites and be taken from Kranji W/T to HMS Terror some 3 – 5 miles away in a five ton truck which was painted dark navy blue with the letters RN in pure white painted on the sides. We were technically at war with Indonesia at the time and so if ever there was a target it was my truck. Each day when we arrived at the main gates of Terror the same procedure was adhered to – I handed over my pass and my ID card to the sentries who then checked me off against some list or other, handed the items back and walked all round the truck with me to make sure that there was nothing there that shouldn't be there. All of the time my driver would sit there having a smoke and talking to anyone who passed by and was not even questioned or had to show ID. Perhaps I just looked sinister and shifty.

Having been cleared at the gate we then drove anywhere that we wanted to in Terror without any form of hindrance. Most days and particularly those around payday I was asked to buy naval items from the stores or any other item that Sew Sew couldn't sell from her little stall and the idea was that I charged a 10% commission for doing so and this went in to the benevolent fund back at base. Hm ! ! ! remember earlier and making up funds from own pocket, this I did with great regularity.

Most days we had to collect stores by way of foodstuffs to feed the hungry hordes back on campus and whilst they were checked off by the stores Jack Dusty they were never checked over by the sentries who just waved us through the main gates.

One particular day we'd loaded up a consignment of fresh meat in the highly polished dustbins that were used for the transportation having first weighed the contents, checked them off against the store's inventory sealed down the lids – more to keep the flies off than for security purposes and then driven the few miles back. Somehow between leaving the stores in Terror and arriving back at the galley at Kranji two whole haunches of beef had disappeared. I still to this day have no idea as to how the thieves managed it because we didn't stop, slow down or change from our normal route but disappear they did. Luckily for me nobody really

wanted my input and so they grilled the driver who I believe left the employ of the Navy shortly thereafter.

Having completed my tour of duty as the Postie, it was back to the serious grind of the comms department, but I might add duly refreshed and raring to go. But alas all good things do come to an end and so it was that I left Kranji W/T on the 30th March 1961 and drove to HMS Terror for the ubiquitous leaving routine. It was whilst waiting for my travel documents that a rather delicious young mother turned up in the travel office wearing a tight and very revealing dress. She wasn't wearing a BRA, which in those days was eroticism in the extreme, and all of a sudden I didn't want to go home. Unfortunately Paya Lebah airport awaited and I was flown home to the joys of English winter weather – you may call it Spring but believe me it was so cold that I even changed into my uniform just to try and keep warm. In fact I remember having to unpack my kitbag in the men's loo at Liverpool Street station which was looked on with some amazement by some of the other users.

England – The first return

For weeks and weeks there had been the countdown to the return to the Motherland and now having landed I was tired, cold and just a bit travel weary because you may remember that we were moved around the world by the air trooping company known as Hunting Clan and they flew the old turbo prop Britannia's – top speed was around three hundred miles per hour seemed to make the journey last forever.

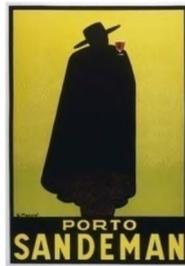
So it was that I managed to kit myself out for the 30 minute train journey to the end of suburbia – Cheshunt my home town. As nobody knew that I was on my way home there was no great meeting of the family – there again my lot wouldn't have turned out unless the building were collapsing. My father said that my mother was in hospital but wouldn't let on what was exactly the problem. My mother had been operated on for a hysterectomy. In those days this was women's problems country and was not even discussed in the presence of the men and certainly not in front of a son.

Whilst away I'd accumulated about 30 days worth of leave which to me was forever bearing in mind that for most of my formative years I'd been away at boarding school then I'd joined the navy so there was hardly anyone that I knew. It was the most boring 30 days of my life that I can remember – that is until the moment that my draft orders came through – joy at last I could now get away from the constant moaning and fighting and arguing that went on in our house between my parents.

Report to HMS Victory announced the draft chit in bold letters – strange I thought but hey a draft chit was a draft chit so who was I to challenge the naval drafting boys at Haslemere. My travel warrant showed the final destination as Portsmouth. I duly presented myself at the main gates of Vicky barracks (as they were affectionately known) only to be questioned quite strongly about why was I there and not at HMS Mercury. Now sometimes the seamen department could harbour some real thickos and this day was to be no different because I kept showing them my drafting orders which quite clearly stated where I should be and was, but they still couldn't grasp the point until I suggested that someone could phone through to Mercury for a bit of guidance.

Success came within 10 minutes and shortly thereafter I found myself being transported to Mercury in my own 40 seater bus at last the millionaire treatment. This all fell apart when we arrived at Leydene as I was grilled and questioned all over again. At this point I was beginning to get just a little frayed around the edges and my remark of “if nobody likes it they can phone up drafty and tell him what a pratt he is” didn’t go down that well. Well at last I was back where I should be and funnily enough it seemed almost like coming home – sad really but it was where I was the happiest. It was here that I met up with a good mate by the name of John Freeman, a tall raw-boned featured man with a murderous sense of humour.

The little “Y” station on the hill



It seemed quite odd returning to Mercury as a fully fledged floating type sailor still with a bit of a sun tan and sporting a cap tally that said you’d been to sea and all of that sort of stuff. Having said that the cap tallies always turned the heads of the trainees (particularly the Wrens I’m pleased to say) and set you aside as someone a bit special – this is the way it should be I mused. I’d been in the Navy for just three years.

I reported in for duty at the EW section main office which I’d seen 18 months previously on passing out from my trainee days. Now it was going to be different and was. My duties now were not just to be the gash hand and make tea, or be the office typist I was being thrown straight in to the cold war – listen out for the Russian Navy Northern fleet. This was more like it I thought as I tried to get in to the wireless office except that they wouldn’t let me through the door unless I was accompanied by the office waller. Finally I was in to the most unprepossessing room that you could imagine, Strip lights, polished lino, green and grey walls but chock full of radio receivers. Apparently they’d heard of my achievements in the far east or perhaps my notoriety had gone before as I was immediately put in charge of my watch – power at last there. were three of us all told.

We were outside the normal routine for Mercury and therefore we were either on duty, in bed prior to the next watch or at home – wherever that may be. We were armed with a brown watch keeping station card which meant that we could effectively come and go as we pleased. Life was bliss.

The EW Section was based to the north of the Leydene in a complex that housed some of the training facilities, and was behind an enormous wire fence with very nice barbed wire rolled along the top. The door to the office was also bolted and locked so it became the most secure section at Mercury.

There was only one problem our watch changeover time during the night was at 0200 and there was nobody about to let you in. The Navy always had a solution and here was no different – let loose on the klaxon horn attached to the fence twice and someone would turn out from the office to open the gate. This only worked some of the time because if the operator was in the middle of a good intercept the chances of him leaving his post was nil. Many has been the time when people have waited in the freezing cold, or with rain trickling down their necks for a good twenty minutes before being rescued. Remember Mercury was situated on the top of a hill and during bad weather the weather was extremely bad.

One night I turned up at the appointed hour to be greeted by the PO of the other watch saying that only I should sit on his circuit and wait to receive a set of signals to be transmitted by the Russians at their missile testing range at Baku. All of a sudden there was a lot of Morse activity albeit on about strength 3 and I managed, it turned out, to get the lot which was a feather in my cap only marred by the fact that I'd not seen one of this type of signal before and therefore wrote it out as long sentence and not on a separate pad. Didn't matter, my name was now up there with the best.

I managed one night to pick up the Northern Fleet just as they changed their call sign sequence, 4 days earlier than had been expected because someone in the Russian ships had made a balls up. That's how the codes are broken just by a simple mistake. Wouldn't happen now as the world is so sophisticated but then it was breakthrough time. Having said all of that NOBODY in the department gave any form of guidance or direction as to what was wanted and required. All that I knew from that point on was that if there was anything unusual then I picked up the scrambler phone and spoke at length to a chap (I know not who) on the other end.

One of my later chums had arrived with a few others only to set off on the naval version of the Russian trawlers. In other words the little ship hadn't caught a fish in years but was covered in radio aerials and was fully crewed by naval personnel. Like the Russians and East Germans our lot steamed off and through the Russian fleet on one of its many exercise. This was the big listening game of the time. I tried to get a loan draft to one of the seriously undercover deployments e.g. either the trawlers or the submarine trips up to the White Sea. Unfortunately I never managed either so had to be content with the inroads that I felt I made into the cold war.

I must admit that I experienced the same feelings and emotions with intercepting Russian traffic as I did when I had the Indonesians at the mercy of my ears – it was fantastic every time that you nailed a perfect intercept.

The team at Mercury were not like those at Kranji, this lot thought they were A lot better than they were especially one of them who tried to be the Chief's best Friend – he was soon relegated to the second division by Johnnie Freeman and me. Now there was a mate – John Freeman. We worked together, travelled back and forth to London, drank together and talked and talked.

One day after a 72 off John suddenly confronted me and said "I'm getting married, will you be my best man?" I didn't even know that he had a girlfriend let alone wanted to tie the knot so the big question when popped to me stopped me dead in my tracks. I think for the first time in my life I was speechless. Then all of a sudden it seemed the most natural thing in the world, why shouldn't I be my oppo's best man. The other point to remember was

that I actually didn't have a lot to do other than turn up with the groom and the ring on the appointed day.

Now the wedding wasn't long after the announcement so apart from keeping my Chum on top notch I just let it all breeze past me even to the point when John and I went to spend a weekend in Catford/Lewisham which was where he lived and Stayed with the bride to be and her mother. I can't for the life of me remember the bride to be's name but the future mother in law was a lady by the name of Rose.

Rose could cook the most magnificent fry up that you can imagine – it had the lot and in great quantities but unfortunately apart from her voice which sounded like she'd been smoking at least 40 a day all of her life, that is all that I can remember of her.

Came the day of the wedding both of us had been on the 0200 to 0800 duty so really hadn't had much sleep in the past 24 hours but it was a Saturday and we were off duty. We set off on our journey to London with the help of a mate who had a car and offered a lift which we gladly took up and by 0900 we were on our way in brilliant sunshine. We made good progress for the first half an hour by which time the weather had suddenly taken a turn for the worst, so had the car which by this time was coughing and spluttering its way along the A3- very slowly. It wasn't that we were ungrateful it was that the wedding was at 1200 and we really didn't want to be late that we nearly abandoned our mate in a pub car park. So as not to appear churlish we did go in for a pint or two before setting off again and to be fair the car wasn't too bad until somewhere on the south circular road that it was left to die.

We went on to the underground for part of the journey then up to the surface for a taxi. Thank God John knew where we were going. The taxi driver hadn't come across two sailors before who were changing into their uniforms in the back of his cab and we could see him looking horrified into his rear view mirror. By this the time we were enveloped in a thick fog and the progress to the church was even slower so much so that we ended up running the last 200 yards.

The vicar and several other family members were standing on the pavement and the looks of relief on their faces as we hurtled out of the murk was plain for all to see. The bride was on her third time of "round the block slowly" and so the situation was just a bit on the delicate side.

The vicar was a good soul who calmed John down and the wedding ceremony went ahead without a hitch from that point on with the only down side being that the wedding photos were all taken inside at the reception.



It's always said that the best man invariably falls for the chief bridesmaid. This time was no different at all, she was drop dead gorgeous with a figure that women would kill for. She also was a fencing aficionado hence her fabulous figure and we hit it off right from the word go. There wasn't to be a honeymoon so it was that John, his new bride, me and the girl from the piste ended up back at Rose's house together with Rose. Things got physical from this point so it's best remembered and not committed to paper. Nobody gets hurt!!!

Off Duty Travels

In early sixties hardly any of us had our own transport so we relied on the generosity of those that had, in other words we would thumb a lift whenever possible. Thankfully we nearly always managed to get a good lift into London very shortly after the thumb had been extended and even though we travelled in civvies we would hang our white cap on the outside of our holdall. In those days people would stop for servicemen as everyone in the world knew how badly paid we really were.

Sometimes the lift was of the best, others were slightly more exciting as when we were picked up on the A3 by two young girls of about the same age as us. It turned out that they were married to sailors who were away at sea at the time and they had taken pity on us.

The one who was driving was just a bit scatty and would keep turning round to talk even when overtaking, but she was quite a comedienne nonetheless. It was when we mounted the pavement in a busy shopping street that John and I really woke up and suggested that the next underground station was exactly where we wanted to be. They left us, still talking and turning round to wave as they sped off down the road.

The worst of all lifts was when we were just a bit short of a lift when along came a lorry – loaded to the maximum with apples we were told by the driver – so in we climbed.

“Where to ?” “London” we said “No problem, I’m passing that way myself”. Grateful for the lift we both settled down in the cab – well settled down for about 20 seconds was about the limit as the gears crashed and the noise from the engine box was horrendous we hurtled back on to the highway. It was sometime later that the driver managed to coax the truck up to 40mph and so it remained for maybe half an hour when our man needed the loo, a cup of tea and to regain his hearing. We declined his offer of breakfast and went out to thumb another lift. We got one immediately but it was only for 5 miles or so but hey beggars can’t be choosers. We waited and waited for ages but no luck when who should come around the corner but – yes it was Mr Bulmers apples, so in we got once again and continued the slow lorry to London.

London is noted for pageantry and tradition which visitors seem to lap up not least of which is the changing of the guard at Horse Guards Parade. Now most people think that HG is the big expanse of gravel that is used once per year by the monarch when she/he inspects whichever regiment of guards is the in flavour. Well it isn’t. It’s a relatively small courtyard facing out on to Whitehall and in there they have lots of people sitting on horses.

It was one morning that we’d had our lift and had been dropped off in The Mall - and for some odd reason we were both in uniform can’t think why- and we took the obvious shortcut across the gravel and in to HG just as they were changing the guard. There were heaps of tourists all standing behind the white line more to stop the horses being frightened than for their safety I suspect, and us . Well we just dived through and I think I said something along the lines of “ I wonder what they’d do if I threw a firecracker in amongst them” The Americans laughed and so did John at which this big bloke on a horse started shrieking for us to stop.

“Don’t you salute on officer on parade ?” demanded the man on the horse. Well we didn’t know whether he was an officer or a sergeant major, let’s face it the uniform that they wear doesn’t help a lot, so this we told him. His voice rose to a shriek wanted names etc which seemed a over the top so we ran off up the road with murderous sounds ringing in our ears.

Upon return to Mercury I was questioned about this incident but could only feign total innocence of the whole affair “Wot me Chief, I was nowhere near the place” We heard no more.

So life progressed from on watch to another until the fateful day arrived. Another draft chit fell upon my desk in the wireless office. I was off to rejoin the real sailing navy again aboard a brand new ship HMS Falmouth.

That was the last time I saw John Freeman. I heard later that he’d subsequently divorced and been drafted away. Pity, he was one of those people about whom you could say “he was a thoroughly nice man, a great oppo.”



H.M.S. Falmouth

So here I was fully kitted out and drafted to a brand new ship of the line –

HMS FALMOUTH a Rothesay class general service frigate – Type 12 Modified.

Now that really is a mouth full but that was exactly how she had been listed at the Admiralty. The stats are as follows :-

Displacement	2560 tons fully laden
Length	370 feet
Beam	41 feet
Draught	17 feet
Armament	2 x 4.5 forward mounted 2 x 3 Limbo anti sub missile launchers 1 Wasp Helicopter
Speed	30 knots max
Crew	235 (not a lot of room left over)



The bow section on these ships had been designed by a naval architect who'd probably not been to sea for some time. It was big and angular the idea being that the bows would displace the sea rather than cut through like the bows of a destroyer. It only worked to a degree the rest of time it made for a very uncomfortable ride in rough weather.

One of the effects of being at sea in rough weather can be the G forces that push you in all sorts of weird directions, but this ship didn't seem to appreciate this phenomena it just continued to batter it's way forward. Almost as soon as I arrived on board it was off to Portland for the dreaded work up or shakedown cruise as the Yanks call it , and so it was that we arrived in late September of 1961 to endure torture for the next few weeks. Now Portland naval base and harbour are probably the most inconveniently placed establishment that you can imagine. HMS Osprey was situated at the end of Chessil Beach opposite the fleshpots of Weymouth and also facing the English Channel. All in all not that attractive especially as the ships undergoing the work up were always moored right at the end of "Q" pier.

This meant that you were open to the elements and October of '61 was just a little unkind at times with the weather ranging from sunny and warm to downright cold.

The object of the work up was to make sure that the ship and the crew were in all respects ready for sea and duty to the crown.

FOST staff I can tell you did make sure in no uncertain terms. We put to sea at 0800 every working day only to return at around the 1700 mark. During this time everything possible happened – Power was cut, engines switched off, there fires on board in every department. We had signals exercises, gunnery and missile shoots, the galley being out of

operation, helicopter launch and recovery. In other words we did everything in six weeks that we may never come across in our entire naval careers.

Towards the end of the exercising period we had to carry out an “Aid to the Civil Power” this meant that we as a fighting ship of the R.N. could help out in a disaster zone. Six of us were detailed off to be casualties with broken bones showing through tears in uniforms or as in my case the whole of the back of a boiler suit had been suitably charred and torn. Onto my back they stuck what looked like a huge full English breakfast and then they added the makeup. The result was horrendous and even the rescue teams that found me laying by a crane yelling and shouting as if in pain nearly threw up. We were all congratulated on our acting skills by FOST staff.

About midway into the training all hell broke loose. Someone had raided a locker and taken a wallet and money so the police were called and nobody was allowed ashore – it was also a Saturday at that – until everyone had been questioned and finger printed by the MOD plod. The culprit was oddly enough actually caught and needless to say ended up in the slammer. The rating who’d left his locker open was also seriously in the pooh as well because that was considered nearly as big a crime as that of theft. In other words you were not allowed to put temptation in someone’s way.

In terms of the job this was the first ship that I’d come across where there was no antagonism towards us because the whole of the ops room set up welcomed us as part of the warfare team. Our main job was the interception of CW signals via the FH4 but more crucially was the detection of all types of radar emissions from all sources i.e. Ships, aircraft and our speciality – Submarines. This we did to the best of our ability using the UA3 as they could only give an indication of direction plus or minus 10 degrees. What happened was that the UA3 “horns” received S, C or X band emissions from radar sets fired them to the set, which converted them in to direction visually on the tiny cathode ray tube. More importantly radars have their own sound from Hz to MHz or more and the ones that we were after were the submarines which have their own very distinctive sound and shape on the screen.

Upon detection we had to hit a panic button which rang a loud bell in the ops room and then give over the intercom our analysis of the intercept – then the ops people played with the info and of we’d go to “war” yet again. Great fun was had by all until the first night of the final action station which was to last two days.

Everyone had been at action stations for some hours which meant that you didn’t leave your place of work unless necessary (loo or something). The ship was in convoy with the RFA Tideflow (maybe Tidesurge) and a full force 10 storm had blown up so most of the radar repeaters were cluttered with every echo imaginable. All of a sudden at just before Midnight on the 4th November 1961 up pops a jolly old submarine runs his radars for 4 turns of the aerial and then stopped. we got him, it was reported to the ops room the klaxons rang and so it was off to sink the enemy once again. Whilst we’d been on watch one of FOST staff had been in the EWO just checking on our progress, as soon as the contact had been made he dived out to the ASDIC room next door and all was to play for.

I was relieved at 2359 but had nowhere to go so under one of the benches I squeezed and nodded off almost immediately. Sometime later there was an almighty crash, Condition ABCD was announced over the Tannoy and all the internal lights were turned on (at action stations only the dimmest of lights are left on so as not to affect night sight).

One of the drivers had gone very gung ho and decided to hurl the ship under the bows of the approaching RFA so that they could catch the sub and sink it. The upshot was that the sub escaped and we were hit side on (T boned) and the mighty crash had been the bows of that ship hitting the side of the bulkhead against which I had been resting, as well as the collision noise.

The ship was about to sink if nothing was done immediately as we could only make 4 knots headway in to the very teeth of the force 12. We in the EWO were now surplus to requirements and were despatched to start the patching up operation. Hammocks were brought up from every mess deck that was accessible and these were jammed in to the hole and so on. The only trouble was that the area that we worked in had no lights and was full of FFO (the stuff that the boilers run on) and that stinks to high heaven. One young lad actually walked out of the side of the ship with a hammock and it was only his mate who held on to him that avoided a tragedy.

One poor sub lieutenant was actually trapped in his bunk just a few feet from where we were and couldn't get out because the side of the ship was rapped over his bunk. Just a few inches above his head was a severed cable that sparked and flared and could have ignited the oil. After we got back to land this officer disappeared for about 24 hours and was last seen uproariously drunk heading to town. Nobody objected he'd been trapped for some three hours before release.

Two of the stoker PO's were given commendations for the work they put in on the damage control, the ships carpenter was dies-rated for being useless – he was the only real casualty, he almost sawed his thumb off in state of panic – two senior ops room ratings were sent on reassessment courses. The captain faced a Court martial but found not guilty, and the submarine plot officer, who should have seen that we were on a collision course with the RFA, lost a lot of seniority which would have seriously affected his promotion in the navy.

The FFO damaged virtually everyone's kit so there was a brand new issue to us all in particular our shoes which actually fell apart as we walked along. Powerful stuff that FFO.

Apparently FOST who was in an adjoining ship during our exercise had commented that Falmouth had gone below water so badly that even he was surprised to see us surface again. Still we did and some 9 hours later the mighty storm had gone through and as we entered harbour in brilliant sunshine people just lined the jetty just to take a look at the ship that shouldn't have been.

Dear old Falmouth was photographed from every angle but we found out later that FOST staff used all of the photographs and the written information as part of the instructions on how to save a severely damaged ship at sea. At least some good came of 00.24 on the 5th November 1961



Apparently FOST who'd been on board HMS Zephyr had as soon as the collision taken place had grabbed all of the "tablets" on top of the radar repeater in the ops room and had secured them away as evidence of the smash. Apparently we'd been on a second collision course for four minutes which is a hell of long time in anyone's language and we should have altered course at least three and a half minutes earlier.

The problem had been caused by the weather which had made all of the radar repeaters in the Ops room cluttered and therefore unreadable. There was however one plot that remained clear and that was the AS plot in the control of the AS directing officer (whose name I cannot recall). He'd managed to get himself in a complete muddle and ended up on the deck with his headset and control leads wound around his neck. More importantly than that he felt that the captain really didn't need to know where the other ships were at that time and that he was going to keep it a secret from one and all – now I'm being really Sarcastic – still on the other hand many of us could have died on that night.

We spent a couple of days alongside repairing whatever could be sorted out by the crew and then it was off to sea again to HM dockyard Plymouth. The journey was totally without mishap or event and the sea was like a piece of glass all the way to Guzz .

Almost as soon as we were secured in the dry dock orders were being given for us to disembark to HMS Drake where the majority of the crew were to be billeted for the coming months whilst the necessary repairs were made.



I like some of the Comms department remained but some bade farewell and were drafted elsewhere to new ships or to Mercury for advancement courses.

Life at Drake and effectively on board took on a very leisurely pace as apart from a direct teleprinter line there was not an awful lot for any of us to do so we effectively became Quartermasters. This was great fun as I had to receive visitors from the dockyard, from other ships, from the local dignitaries whilst wearing No 8's and not the normal gangway rig. I had to attend to sunset and colours and belt out a blast on the bosun's call. I must admit it was an odd few months' service on a hulk that was being cut to pieces and then reassembled.

One of the great pities was that Falmouth was to have joined the Londonderry Squadron as soon as the work up had been completed so much so that there was already emblazoned on the funnel the "Red hand of Ulster".

So it was that I found myself enjoying the delights of Plymouth. There was the whole of the jazz scene going on no matter where you looked every bar and pub was playing the royal music (I loved Trad jazz and still do to this day) and one or two of us went from club to club at the drop of a hat. One abiding memory of HMS Drake was that they cooked the best chips that I have eaten in my entire life – spectacular is the only way to describe what the Chefs did with potato and hot cooking oil I can still taste them.

As usual the easy life wasn't going to last and so it was that my draft chit to RAF Tangmere arrived – I was going on my Russian Linguist course that I'd applied for some time in the distant past. This was more like it I thought, now I could really train to be a proper spy – funny how imagination can outstrip ability !!! more of this in the next chapter.

By this time some of the major works of repair had been carried out not least of which was the total refurbishment of the captain's cabin which after the collision had been completely destroyed so that there was nothing that could be recovered and re used apart from his personal effects. The reason I point this out is that on my last day aboard the tots were passed around and the silly card games were being won by me – needless to say the whole winning episode was a big put up job manufactured by the mess – I managed to get absolutely slaughtered on navy rum. This became blindingly obvious when I was presented to the captain for his farewell handshake and little speech and saw at least double of everything. I do however remember his kind words about the EW department and that it was a branch that the navy would look forward to more in the future.

Sadly I don't remember much about the rest of the journey from Plymouth to RAF Tangmere in Sussex. To use modern parlance – I was mullahed.

The making of a spy

RAF Tangmere and it's near destruction

I'd applied for this posting many months beforehand by literally announcing that I'd like to go down the route of the old time (S) or specials and get into the intercept world in a big way.

Firstly there came the word test in that we sat around in a room and a person in civilian clothes read out a list of words that are Russian but effectively international. Write down the words phonetically we were told and there are three that stand out in my memory to this day – Troompet, footbol and sandvitch – none of which I used again during the whole of my Russian course.

Secondly I had to attend a mini medical at an obscure building in Wimbledon of all places and then was placed in a soundproof cubicle armed with a button which I was told to press as soon as the sound in my earphones disappeared. At one point the door was almost thrown open and this odd looking chap enquired whether or not which later on in my career became evident through the work that I carried out.

So here I was at the main gate of an RAF station of all places not knowing what to expect but I could see that cloaks and daggers did not seem to be the order of the day. There were uniforms everywhere including those of the Army Intelligence Corps. Magic – my Walter Mitty ego was about to take over.

Within 24 hours of my somewhat watered down joining routine I found myself in the reception in an odd Nissen hut on the furthest point away from the accommodation Blocks as was possible to find anywhere on the base. We had to catch a bus every time that we wanted to either go to or return from “work”.

This in itself was not too demanding but should you be detailed off as the duty security man there was a problem at night which entailed the use of a “Red Devil” government issue bicycle. So the man on duty caught the bus with the bike inside travelled to the main block for a shower and change of clothing before returning to the classrooms to stand guard over the secret documentation kept there.

Evening Meal was at 1800 so it was back on the bike to the main block to avail himself of the culinary delights presented by the RAF. Then the half mile back to the unit and settle down for the night. There was absolutely nothing to do during this duty other than revise the day's work or listen to the radio – no television then – or just read a book etc..

At sunset it was down with the ensign – yes we even had our own mast/flag pole and conducted colours and sunset in the normal Naval way – before erecting a camp bed and turning in for the night. The whole process was repeated at breakfast the following morning so if Nothing else we were pretty fit language students. One of the guys who was slightly ahead of me on his course was a mad Scotsman whose name I can't recall so we'll just refer to him as Jock.

Now Jock had a certain attitude to life in general and to the RAF in particular, he didn't like them very much and this was apparent one day when he was the duty security man. We'd left the unit in the bus but Jock had decided that he was going to beat everyone back by going it alone on the Red Devil and so off he went peddling furiously. Just a few yards from our buildings was the main runway but just before it were sets of traffic lights to stop you venturing across when planes were coming in to land (sensible).

The lights went red and so we stopped, Jock didn't he just kept going when we noticed that the lights weren't on to allow planes to land, they were being used because four Canberra Bombers were taxiing around the peri track towards us. This point didn't do anything to deter our flying Scot, he rode straight at them waving his arm furiously for them to get out of the way. How he didn't end up actually inside one of the jet engines we'll never know because all that he did was to lay flat across the handlebars and shoot under the wings of all four of these beasts. Jock was in trouble again.

Odd chap really, he wouldn't buy shaving soap and so was constantly covered in cuts and bruises to his chin. He also wouldn't buy or wear underclothes – too much money for both was his answer.

The actual naval unit was as I've said as far from the main blocks as could be, and consisted of interlocking huts all made of asbestos. There was a parade ground – or car park to the rest of the world – and we had our own mast/flagpole. The classrooms were themselves very small and six of us usually made a crowd. Why everything was so secretive we've yet to discover because the Russian language is the same for everyone except I suppose that ours was based almost entirely on the usage by the Russian military.

We had three main instructors – Messrs Radetski, Godlewski and Zherzhovski all of whom had suffered at the hands of both the Germans and the Russians during both war and peacetime. Rads was an inveterate gambler, Gods smoke the most disgusting smelling Russian cigarettes and Min sounded like Min from the Goons hence his name. They were all of them extremely nice and patient people mind you when dealing with someone like me I suppose you had to have the patience of a saint. Once having mastered the intricacies of the Cyrillic alphabet life became a lot easier in that at least you could read the text books that we'd been given even if you didn't understand a lot of the content.

Every week we were expected to increase our vocabulary by a further 100 words but with an ever growing number relating to the Russian Naval/Military – which of course in later years to be able to say “Our missile radar has now been switched Off” wouldn't have a lot of commercial use when trying to earn your living outside of the Mob (navy). Having said that it was all very exciting stuff to us young sailors whose imagination could occasionally run riot.

Our local town was Chichester and so it was there that we would gravitate to meet the local crumpet or so we hoped. So now armed with a few hundred disconnected words in Russian we decided that this was to be our ploy just speak to each other using any word in any order and laughing a lot. It's surprising how little interest is taken in you when you spout off “Eh oborotnaya tovarich” and then chuckle to your mate, whilst leering at the local talent. All it actually means is the letter E (pronounced Eh) and everyone knows that tovarich is comrade. We never did pull using that technique – I wonder why??? perhaps they were all Russian speakers.

I hit a brick wall midway during my sojourn at spy school – The Verbs of Motion. This particular part of the Russian language has caused many a problem to many a would be Russian speaker as there are so far as I remember 8 of the blighters. Instead of saying as we would in English that “we are going into Chichester for a couple of beers” and leave it at that, in Russian you had to describe each particular function i.e. travelling – how, by train, by car, by tractor and so on. Were you going to stay overnight or would you return that day and by what means?????

It was mental madness for me and so my stay at spy school was a mere six months even though my good chums Radetski and Godlewski apparently almost pleaded for me to remain as they thought that I would if given time make a good linguist. Nice to know that the professionals thought I was ok but it occurs to me that my removal from Tangmere came only a reasonable period after having endured the Positive Vetting procedure that we all had to go through – odd really as I had some pretty high calibre intelligence work after that.

As stated earlier RAF Tangmere was a working establishment for aircraft as well as being the inter services language school, which created a bit of a problem – female officers. What you have to remember is that WRNS officers did not enjoy a salute in the Royal Navy except if you felt a bit kind that day and hauled off a salute to the unsuspecting lady – you usually got a great big smile for the salute and some of the girls were drop dead gorgeous which made you feel pretty damned good yourself. The non saluting bit didn’t go down that well with some of the WRAF officers especially when we walked past them just chatting away and minding our own business. One of these ladies had the figure of a bean pole so nothing seemed to fit too well, and she had a voice reminiscent of Margaret Rutherford. The scream of “You there, sailor ! Don’t you salute officers when you see them” was when we first heard it not taken seriously as we advised this poor unfortunate that we didn’t have to bother if we didn’t want to. She went berserk demanding to know our names. Now on the front of No 8’s over the left breast pocket in large black letters on a white background was our names. Almost to a man we clapped our hands over these and ran off down the road with MR in hot pursuit. The following day we were in the pooh again – all of us, that is, because nobody would own up to the transgression. This happened three or four times after that as it had now become a sport rather like bear baiting.

In the whole of my stay at Tangmere I can only remember one social event occurring and that was a dance (now would be called a disco I suppose) held in the NAAFI the RAF and ARMY all turned out in their best including the obligatory white shirt and tie whilst we were a little more colourful in our approach. Most of us had served abroad where a coloured shirt and jeans or light coloured trousers were the norm. We were frowned on by all and sundry which made us more outrageous. The evening started going downhill slightly when the dance band had their half time break and the interval music was going to be supplied by a GROUP no less. On to the small stage came a bunch of characters wearing what looked like spray on jeans and T shirts (gasps from the RAF) who set about plugging in all sorts of wires and horror of horrors – Guitars. One of the group looked familiar. Mad Jock had arrived with his group and they turned to volume to maximum and started to play. The effect of a cross between The Shadows and The Sex Pistols has be heard and seen to be believed. I managed about half an hour before the girl that I was chatting up suggested a walk outside. I would add that I didn’t make it back to the mess until the sun was rising the next day.

The strange thing about the girl from the dance was that she was German and the guy who liked to think of her as his girlfriend was also German/English and was on one of the advancement courses in the navy unit. I didn't know that the navy recruited foreign nationals, perhaps they didn't and this guy had citizenship – who knows? Having said that he was getting more agitated as the evening wore on so I took it upon myself to advise him that me and Helga (real name not known) were leaving for a night of passion. How I don't know, but we ended up in a little wooden hut on the top of a hill and the rest dear reader is between me and Helga.

There were as you may have assumed some strange people at the spy school including me I suppose. Mad Jock like me went to earth after the night of the dance which had deteriorated almost to a brawl I later heard. It was shortly after that I found myself with the dreaded security duty and so settled down to the by now boring routine, when along came Jock who'd decided to keep me company. It was a lovely sunlit evening that we sat and talked and listened to the radio whilst sitting outside the main entrance to the RN Unit when we decided that it was about time for a bit ceremony and naval tradition to be adhered to. Sunset.

Now sunset in the navy is a very formal ceremony and cannot take place after 2100 no matter how late the sun stays above the horizon and is given the full blown set of honours – Whistle (bosun's call, swords, saluting and the like) Jock decided that a sword was needed for this particular occasion and so disappeared into the CO's office to return minutes later with the full set – sword, scabbard and belt all of which he donned. 2100 came, I blew the call, Jock withdrew the sword and took the salute as I lowered the ensign. It was at this point that one of the on duty Air/Sea rescue crews came past in their Landrover – we ignored their boos and hisses and carried on regardless.

The ceremony over we marched back to the front door and it was here that Jock lost it again and decided that to throw the sword point first at the side of the building was a good idea. Unfortunately asbestos doesn't give when a well aimed naval officers' sword hits it point on – it cracks. The sword didn't fair well either as it acquired somewhat of a bend in it about six inches from the point which made it extremely difficult to slide back in to the scabbard but with brute force and ignorance we managed it. No matter how hard we tried we couldn't release the sword – Jock placed it back on its hook in the pride of place over the CO's fireplace. I dread to think what would happen when and if that sword was ever needed for ceremonial purposes ??????????????

It was shortly after the incident with the sword that I found myself with a draft chit and on my way back to Mercury for another course for advancement. This was in the heart of winter and the classrooms in the EW section were as cold as the North Pole or as I imagined them to be. I'd also volunteered yet again for the work that I liked the best – Communications Intercept – and had been accepted. The problem was that we had to have medicals of all sorts including dentistry as these were apparently not going to be easy to come by once out of the country and the control of the navy.

The consequence was that I received two fillings, which was no great problem, and then to cap it all one extraction all on the same day that I took my finals. Now visiting the dentists is not my favourite pastime and RN dentists didn't even rate that highly. I felt like crap, my face hurt and it was freezing cold. I failed two out of the eleven and this constituted

an overall failure. Me outside one of the classrooms spitting blood into the snow during an oral exam didn't stand me in good stead.

Within a couple of days I was then in to a totally different environment – PCT for Naval Party 1984, Ascension Island.



ASCENSION ISLAND

This was to be the only specifically intercept draft that I was to get in the navy other than the two or three loan drafts that I'd had in the Far East. This one was effectively run by the civilians from GCHQ and they came with us everywhere we went for our training. From HMS Flowerdown near Winchester to where their compatriots worked on a full time basis. The way that we had been taught to log Morse intercepted messages was to write down everything that was sent on a circuit no matter how silly it sounded when reread.

So when questioned by our "leader" we told him exactly what we'd been taught much to his almost disbelief as he confided that we were on that basis better than the GCHQ operators. Boy we felt smug after that. The second part of our PCT was held at Tangmere of all places and it was here that we spent the last part of our "training" over a couple of weeks. I'm still not sure why we were taken there other than the fact that about a third of our company were "G" and not used the niceties of intercept work. Came the last night of our training and a mere two days before we were due to depart for the South Atlantic – when we as good serving matelots decided on a final run ashore so off it was to somewhere in southern England to try to out drink a poor unsuspecting pub.

I personally don't recall returning to the base that night other than There were several of us grouped around a second world war fighter plane which we managed to move some way from its anchoring point. It was the following morning that the door to our mess burst open and in charged some burly looking RAF police (affectionately known as Snowdrops) I could have been mistaken because eyes ears and me were not generally functioning as a team.

“Any of you lot leave the base last night?” yelled one of the cavalry to which the replies ranged from no to F.O. at which point they departed. Now even I could have deduced that something was amiss as there was one of our lot still asleep but on the deck except that he had both feet in his bed. Most were still clothed from the night before and one Alan Titchmarsh to be was nicely tucked up in his bed with both arms wrapped around a potted fir tree, pot and all.

The Snowdrops returned about a quarter of an hour later, I think the penny had dropped by this time as they were not taking no for an answer, so we told them that we'd been to the NAAFI club for a couple of beers which was effectively true as we'd had the couple of pints before we left the base.

We finally managed to get some breakfast then changed ready to travel back to Mercury on the obligatory blue 40 seater coach and indeed we had what seemed to be a guard of honour of RAF police. We waved, they scowled and off on the next part of our adventure we drove.

Hangovers are a peculiar thing and many people all over the world have put forward their recipe for a cure, none of which are immediate nor as I recall effective. I have however come across the best, most effective, immediate remedy for taking away the throbbing behind the eyes and the nagging headache. All that is required is to be met at the main gate of HMS Mercury by the following Worthies :-

The Officer of the watch

The Master at Arms

The Chief G.I

There were one or two others, with boots and gaiters, looking on.

We were advised that they were going to forgo the necessity of appearing before the OOW as they knew that we were guilty and that our first part of the process was the commanders table. In other words we were in the deep pooh over something and were apparently guilty – nobody had informed us yet of the dastardly crime that had been committed. When you appear before the Commander of a ship you know that you are likely to get a pretty severe punishment if found guilty. On this basis we found ourselves in a no win situation especially when the CDR said that we were all equally as guilty and would therefore appear next before the Captain in 30 minutes time. Still we didn't know what the crime was!!!!

Now to be hauled up before the captain is getting on towards being disgraced or fined or sent to DQ's so when we were all marched in to the main hall at Mercury we were to say the least just a bit bemused. The MAA was there growling and then shouting at us to form a semi circle around the table (this is a bit like the bench in a magistrates court), off caps and to stand to attention. In came the Captain clutching a few sheaves of paper. He didn't look quite as severe as I would have thought under the circumstances, that is until he stated what the problem was. Apparently on the night of the big bash at Tangmere, apart from the aircraft being moved from outside the main gate a person or persons unknown had decided to take down the senior officers burgee, cut up the main halyard into nearly equal lengths and leave

the same hanging over the cleat on the main mast in front of the parade ground. The AOC's little flag was nowhere to be found and therefore we were designated as the main culprits. How unfair, a bit on the slaughtered side we may have been but to desecrate – well how could they even think that it was us. We were given the most unexpected way out in that the Captain said that he'd received a formal complaint about the incident, but as nobody was going to own up to it, and that as we were leaving the following morning at 0300 and replacements would be impossible to obtain in the few hours left he wanted (commanded) us to sign a formal letter of apology. No lee way was granted - a letter had already been drafted, approved and typed on Admiralty paper and was to be signed by all of us within the next hour. As a final point the flag was to be left in the hall of the wardroom and would be dealt with anonymously.

The flag mysteriously turned up. I found out later that it was a guy called Kendrick who had been the perpetrator of this heinous crime – a more unlikely type you'd be hard to find. We'd missed lunch by this time so it was off to the NAAFI to scrounge whatever food we could. Later that day after we'd manage to stow all of our kit in readiness for the next long journey, we'd all managed to eat well at the evening session when it was agreed that a final drink at the club would be in order so off we went. Now this may not have been one of our better decisions but we had to say goodbye in the normal way. Our take off time was to be 0300 from outside the OOW office so we turned in at around 2200. Unfortunately we were summoned to the MAA office at 2230 and yet again we were in the pooh. Knickers or the lack of them was now the problem – someone had been seen helping themselves to armfuls of the knickers hung out on the WRNS washing line. Kendrick, again the culprit, was removed and did not accompany us to ASN. Pity really, he was my sort of lunatic and he and everyone else thought the whole incident was hilarious – PC was beginning to take hold even then as the powers that be didn't have sense of humour.

In true fashion we all assembled at the correct time with our kit which was duly loaded onto the RN bus. Everyone was checked on by the OOW, MAA and several others who were most concerned that not one of us be left behind. I wonder why ???

I shall never forget the parting words of the MAA as he counted heads yet again , it was almost like something out of the TV series “ On the buses “ “ Even if I have to wait forever I'll get you bastards believe me “. I can vouch for the fact that The Master at Arms wasn't smiling when he said this – it was a chilling send off even though we had our second hang over in the space of two days to dampen the effect.

So it was off to the South Atlantic for we merry band via Heathrow airport as at the time there were very few military flights to Ascension Island other than the via the US which would have caused a bit of a fuss for we RN people should anyone have noticed that we were not civilians, The navy in its ultimate wisdom gave us passports and we were designated as being of the civil service to enable us to over fly a whole bunch of countries. What had been forgotten was that we took with us all of our naval kit in the by now very familiar kit bags and navy hold alls. Anyone with the slightest bit of intelligence would have put two and two together on the basis that we arrived at the airport in a big navy blue coach with Royal Navy in large white letters emblazoned along both sides of it.

Still we played our part and acted as if we had flown to Nigeria many times before as that was where we were heading this time. The journey was like any other when travelling by air – boring. The only point to remember was when flying south over the vast emptiness of

the Sahara desert looking at what we were told was an oil pipeline that stretched for as far as the eye could see. After about an hour I could see that there was an enormous kink – why I asked, because the two crews started from different ends of the desert and nearly missed each other. Could have been just a little on the embarrassing side I suppose.

IKEJA AIRPORT

This was the main airport situated outside the capital city of Lagos – I think that it has now been renamed or that the principle city is somewhere else – that we landed at well after dark. Landing like this was just as well as we were told later that the runway hadn't been extended properly to take account of the modern jet liners (we were in a Boeing 707) and that we finally stopped just 100 feet from the ocean. Makes sense of the controlled crash, hideous application of the airbrakes and the juddering of the plane as we attempted to stop.

This was as of nothing compared with what took place over the next hour or so in the arrivals hall. We walked from the plane to the main building which so far as I can remember was single story structure which I am convinced was made of corrugated iron. We were immediately met by an enormous black guy who demanded our passports and all papers. No, we said, you can't have them but you may look – well we'd only just been issued with brand new documents so we didn't want them out of our sight for more than a minute – this didn't go down well with our man who visibly expanded before our eyes into a huge monster. He won the day and we relinquished our I.D.

It was unbearably hot and humid in this low lying hut which had only two overhead fans turning oh so slowly as to not even move the air which felt as though it was sticking to you. Standing in front of trestle tables we waited, and waited for our kit to arrive not realising that we were supposed to go and locate this ourselves from an adjoining room. Back at the trestle tables all became business like with lots of people all seemingly having something to do and in my case was to lurch forward with a huge list set out on a two foot high board.

“You have got the following items” said the man pointing to this huge list of items including guns, ammunition, drugs, contraband tobacco, I think there was even one section dealing with slavery !!!! I tried to explain that I only had 40 cigarettes on me but to avail they wanted us to unload all of our kit. Now as said earlier this could have been a bit embarrassing as we were all in civilian clothes, travelling on civilian passports with kitbags etc full of Royal Naval uniforms.

I was saved any further embarrassment by a lot of noise coming from the other end of the room. One of our company of brothers was a (G) by the name of Piper and he like myself played hockey whenever he could. Now for some reason that I failed to work out, Piper had decided to bring with him a small kitbag full of Hockey sticks, balls and sundry playing equipment. The sticks in particular were causing a few problems as the man with the board listing items forbidden in Nigeria, was insisting that these came under the heading of military hardware – WAR CLUBS. It ended up with Piper and myself hitting a ball from one end of the shed to the other to prove or at least show that they were sports items. At that moment and luckily for us a small figure strode in to the customs shed. He stood around 5 feet 6 inches tall wearing a white shirt, long khaki shorts and long woollen socks that reached his knees. Barely an inch of bare flesh was on show.

“Hello chaps, everything orl raeet” boomed he. We started to explain the problems when he said “ Don’t worry leave this to me I’m the British High Commissioner here”. At which he marched (literally marched like a guardsman) over to the tables and barked orders to everyone in sight. I have never seen so many eyes rolling and feet shuffling in my life as I saw that night. Our man in Nigeria had scared the living daylights out of these poor people and as a consequence our luggage went through in double quick time, was loaded on to the waiting coach and we were almost carried to our seats. The proper order of things had been re-established by our wild colonial chum. So it was that we spent a couple of days in Nigeria in the hotel doing absolutely nothing which to young men like ourselves was purgatory. All that we could do was to retire to the bar between meals – yet another hangover came our way.

Our stay in Nigeria was to say the least boring, we weren’t allowed to leave the hotel and apart from our own fun that we made there was little for us to occupy ourselves with so it came as a great relief when on the third day we were off on our travels yet again.

I think it would be fair to say that there was a look of total dismay on the faces of our company when we assembled on an obscure part of the airport under a wing of our latest form of transport. I’m sure that many gallant young men flew in a Hastings transport plane at some time in their careers. We hadn’t and standing around looking at this rather glum looking machine didn’t fill any of us with any confidence whatsoever. There were crosses of what looked like plaster that had been painted a silvery grey on the fuselage making it look for all the world like a patch and go sort of plane. It had four turbo engines, the seats were steel framed with very little upholstery on them which wasn’t so good bearing in mind that we had a seven hour flight in front of us. Until the plane became airborne we sort of hung there with rear of the plane several feet lower than the front – not nice. I remember the take off as if it were yesterday on the basis that I dislike flying and to be thrown down the runway on one wheel looking down at the grass didn’t help at all in quenching my fear of flying.

I suppose the whole flight was not unreasonable because I managed to fall asleep twice only to be woken by a burly sergeant wanting to know if I would like some soup. He didn’t wait for my answer but just thrust a steaming mug in which was just below boiling point tinned tomato soup. I will say this it certainly wakes you up very quickly does a handful of superheated soup. The noise of the engines was horrific as the cabin was not pressurised but sheer exhaustion made you nod off, that is until the same sergeant turned up yet again with corned beef sandwiches and thrust these into your hands.

We made the island with not a lot of fuel to spare so the crew advised, and it was on the second circuit around that we all demanded to be landed. I must admit that Ascension from the air is not the most inviting place in the world. It’s made up of 30 plus extinct volcanic vents and so the landscape is like that of the moon (or how we imagine the moon to be) and the volcanic lava ranges in colour from grey ash through buff, brown and on to black.

This was particularly evident as our pilot came in to land when he aimed our plane straight at the cliff side apparently with the object of using the thermals to lift us up over the lip. Now sailors are well known for their expletives and this time there were some that even I’d not come across before as we barely skimmed the rim.

Just as I stepped down from the plane I developed the most excruciating stomach ache in the form of griping pains every 30 seconds or so. So it was that I first came in to contact with the American medical system. The Doc was a pleasant enough sort of bloke until I told him that I was Royal Navy and didn’t have the 3 dollars consultation fee he demanded and

the situation was only rescued by one of the US military who said that all we need do was sign on behalf of the navy and then PAN AM would claim this back from MOD in due course.

He then wanted some money for the drugs so I signed again – I'm not sure that he was convinced that he'd ever get paid nor did I check. It took 24 hours for the stomach gripes to go away so my arrival on the island didn't get off to a very good start.



SPLENDID ISOLATION



“Green Mountain”

As I remarked earlier I'd Not seen a place so isolated or desolate in my life, I thought the Sahara Desert looked bleak and forbidding but of course that was from 5 miles up. The island was just rubble in various heaps with bits of greenery here and there, but having spent six hours flying over the South Atlantic it looked like heaven. Having checked in to our quarters we were let loose on the USAAF Base – one road (very wide), several huts, a few low lying buildings the club and the cinema and then finally the mess hall. Twenty minutes later we'd seen it all.



The USAAF Base was there in name only as the serving personnel were a US Air force Captain and a Master Sergeant and it was to them everyone checked in on how the island was run. In reality the base came under the auspices of the civilian base manager for PAN AM, namely one Mr Len Schluder. Now ASN was primarily a tracking station involved in the American space programme prior to the moon landings. Huge rockets were launched from Cape Canaveral in Florida and aimed down range to land somewhere near to where we were living, all the time these rockets were tracked down the range from bases in the West Indies and South America. Hence a couple of gigantic golf balls manned by people from NASA.

Back to the base. The club (and there was only one) was known as the Volcano Club where drinks of every sort could be purchased during the Very lengthy opening hours. Every drink cost 25 cents no matter what you had be it a can of coke or Canadian Club and 7Up which made it ever so easy on the eye and ear to work out. In the bar you were allowed to buy a whole bottle of spirits but limited to one per day for the princely sum of \$ 2.82 – this was the equivalent of one whole POUND. I had decided that as we were completely isolated from the rest of the world I would go on a massive saving spree and over the forthcoming year managed to save £300 approx. All I drew down in pay was £5 per two weeks which on the basis that drinks only cost 25 cents we were buying 4 to the pound, so our money went a long, long way as there was little else to spend it on. Even the movies were free.



There were one or two admin offices, the barbers and the security guards joint and that was very much what the base was about apart from the living accommodation and the radio station. Yep !!!! it was called Volcano Radio and it's broadcast could be heard all over West Africa and South America.

Two of the guys from the preceding group had stayed behind to “ handover “ the wireless office, the keys and get use tuned in literally to what we should be doing over our draft on the island. In reality the whole operation only took about an hour.

Our place of work was some way from the base and in a place where there were no other buildings or signs of habitation in any direction which is pretty difficult to achieve bearing in mind that the island was approx 7 x 5 miles all in. On first sight the set up wasn't what you would call inspiring. The main building was a large corrugated iron affair with a small brick built building off to one side. The loo was round the back and consisted of two kiosks, traps call them what you will but there was no running water – hence a dry accommodation was the best way to describe the facility, so much so in that there was a bucket of crushed volcanic lava which after the business was completed was shovelled in on top of the what you'd left behind (turds usually). Now this wasn't too bad until around midnight when the black gang would arrive and haul the bucket out from the back of the loo and take it off to where ever they took these things. The problem was that every night one man had to stay behind as security guard to make sure that no agents from somewhere else in the world didn't break down the doors and make off with our days intercept work. Who would do this we had no idea but remain we had to. Now the reason I'm adding this in is that when the others had left at 2230 the sole remaining sentry, once having closed everything down had to make sure his camp bed was in place, and having done so he would , armed with a torch, repair to the engine house and shut down the diesel generator. No lights anywhere remained on. The sky over Ascension is just like being at sea – with no moon it's jet black and the stars are the biggest in the world.

It's kind of spooky being on a tiny island in the middle of the South Atlantic with only a torch as your companion – it is absolutely terrifying when the crap gang arrive in the middle of the night totally unannounced and wake you from a pretty restless sleep by crashing around and yelling at the tops of their voices. The secret was however to wait until they'd been before turning in.

This caused another problem because at this stage you became totally relaxed and off guard as you bedded down for what remained of the night – Donkeys. The island had a herd of approximately 200 wild donkeys all of whom had originated from those that had been used by the marines and their families during their garrison years on the rock whilst Bonaparte had been imprisoned on the island of St.Helena some 750 miles south. These animals had a liking for our part of the island for some odd reason but we as new boys on the block didn't know that, the departing crew had failed to inform.

We had a water butt that attracted these furry friends, and to be awoken during the dead of night by footsteps outside the building (no paths just volcanic rubble) and then a lot of heavy breathing causes the heart to beat out of control and the old sphincter to contract so much that you'd end up with a ring round your throat. I never did get used to it. Even though these animals were wild they kept only just in their comfort zone when we were around and actually like some of the food that we managed to pilfer from the base.

One day we saw a pretty forlorn and sad sight. One of the females had only partially given birth to her calf and it was only half delivered. Not a pretty sight but one where you had to get on and do something about it. Call the vet was the answer and so it was that we met Peter the farmer from the Hill. The calf was of course dead but with the aid of us hanging on to the front end of the donkey and the calf roped to the Land Rover the deed of delivery was

finally accomplished. This donkey became our chum from that point and would always come to see us at some time during the week. Oddly she only arrived when we were on duty not the other crew.

The People

The Island threw up probably the most diverse bunch of people that you could wish to meet and they came from every walk of life that could be imagined. To start off our crew was just typical navy. There was yours truly who was looking forward to the challenge of the job and the environment, my mate Tom Cowan liked his job but didn't want any form of advancement. Tom was a lovely man who wouldn't hurt a fly, he wasn't at all keen on his superiors he just wanted to serve his time and leave almost as he'd arrived – unnoticed.

Tom played the piano accordion and he'd brought this unwieldy instrument with him even managing to get this through the customs shed in Nigeria even though the whole thing was packed with illegal cigarettes and couldn't have been played no matter how much wind was put in it. He even tried to teach me the art of playing the squeeze box but to no avail, I was useless.

Then there was Piper – a man who thought that he and his cronies were highly amusing – he wasn't nor were they unfortunately. The others names escapes me but they were pretty decent people when not trying to impress Piper. We were lorded over by a CRS and an RS the latter of whom was suddenly sent packing mainly I think because of his attitude but he wasn't replaced by anyone else. Pity for him really, it was that he kept trying to run the whole radio station of ours like a military depot. It wasn't in any way shape or form to be considered military, we wore a makeshift uniform at work then almost anything else whenever off duty. Our shoes were Veltschoen sent in from South Africa and was the only form of footwear that could stand the harshness of the lava flows, volcanic rubble and ash. Even then these hard wearing hide shoes only lasted about six months before they started to fall apart (were ripped apart actually) the boss didn't like it too much when he had to ask the South African Navy to send in replacements. There again our boss, one Lt. Mills, wasn't big on any form of confrontation – he was a bit on the timid side.

A couple of examples come to mind in that before we'd even left Mercury all of our passports had been sent to the Brazilian embassy in London who had kindly endorsed them with a six months visa. The idea was apparently that we could take a trip over there from the island by way of R and R before we became stir crazy. One day some friends of ours in the USAF who'd flown in almost forced us to join them and they would fly us to Recife, leave us there then pick us up for redelivery to ASN five days later. Great idea we thought and put the idea to Fred – No joy. Fred wouldn't let us go. His excuse was that we had no insurance, there was no control over where we went and as the transport wasn't UK military he wouldn't be able to get this past our Lords and masters nor the American hierarchy. He just had no spirit of adventure – these guys were doing us a favour and as long as nobody knew about it, no problem .

The second thing that Fred jumped upon was when we were given an old JEEP courtesy of the US Navy who'd left it behind some months before. Again it was a no go by Fred – no insurance, no petrol was his excuse. We'd already organised the latter with the Yanks who were going to let us have a couple of gallons here and there – again on the QT.

On the island there were 12 Naval personnel plus 2 civilians 600 Yanks, 400 St Helenians and 200 Cable & Wireless staff and their families plus 2 farmers. The Americans were all employed by NASA, WECO and PAN AM the latter of which had the sole responsibility of running the day to day lives of everyone on the base plus the movement of personnel and stores. This was of course not only for this island but for the whole chain of tracking stations from Florida through the West Indies and ending up on ASN. The logo was PAN AM, GMRD - Guided Missile Range Division – I'm sure that it was this that caused the downfall of this once mighty airline in that they had too many fingers in too many pies.

There was a certain amount of racism that we in the navy had not come across before to the point that we (me in particular) managed to achieve a level of notoriety. The Saints were all from the island of St.Helena and were employed to carry the menial tasks around the base – mess boys, laundry gang, the pooh brigade etc and whilst everyone of the yanks spoke to them and smiled there was one thing that they would not do under any circumstances – let the Saints buy liquor. They could buy beer but not spirits which apparently was the way that the North American Indians were treated. We however liked our mess boys who lived in the next hut to ours and we would buy for them the bottles of Bacardi that they loved. So much so that we would join them on occasions taking with us Cokes and lemons and spend what would invariably turn in to a riotous evening. Hangovers were guaranteed.

The Saints were the nicest and most honest people that I've come across – they would even stack up any loose change that you'd left on top of your locker when going off to work and not one cent ever went missing. Good people.

The second time that we – Tom and myself – came across racism was again in the common meeting ground of the Volcano club. We'd made friends with a bunch of people who all worked for a heavy construction company rather like the US Navy CeeBees. They were making the roads and repairing where necessary the runway at Wideawake Field and so on, so were a hard bitten lot but not aggressive. They were all to a man from the Southern States of America and were undoubtedly – REDNECKS there were lots of “ Yo'all “ and “grits” and other words that none of us actually understood from day one. These guys kept themselves very much to themselves. Their boss was known as the Colonel, apparently from his army days during the Korean war, and I do recall that these guys served under him at some point. He was actually a dead ringer for Colonel Sanders of KFC fame so I'm not sure about the Colonel description, but they all seemed to like it and the status quo was maintained.

Now one of our other chums was the head of the NASA project on the island and so held a very senior position in the American community. He was over six feet tall probably weighed in at around eighteen stone and had the biggest grin in the world. So far as the construction gang were concerned he didn't count – he was almost jet black. So it was that one evening we were sitting around just having a beer and generally chatting about everything and nothing when in came our black mate. We asked him to join us and this he did although the look on his face was a bit strange, we carried on regardless knowing what our redneck buddies were like and when one of them was going to buy a round he was obliged to

include the man from NASA. Now this may not seem strange to us but to the redneck this was a giant step forward. After about ten minutes everyone was talking to everyone else, including the redneck to the black guy. I rather suspect that George the redneck had never in his life sat down at the same table as a black person, swapped a beer and talked as a human being. Strange that a man from NASA with several degrees to his name was not considered to be an equal by a caterpillar tractor driver because of the colour of his skin. As before, we in the Navy didn't really care that much we just soldiered on around the world regardless of race, creed or colour on the basis that we owned most of it anyway.

The exercise was not repeated except that there was a mutual acceptance of each of the parties from that point on – little victories are glorious !! Len Schluder was the base Commandant and was solely employed by PAN AM Peter Thomas was effectively the secretary, personal assistant and general dogsbody to the base manager. Now Pete was a Saint and was part coloured which meant that our Rednecks had to ask him for appointments to see the base manager when necessary – tricky as you will appreciate. Pete and I became bosom pals for some reason but nevertheless we had many laughs and not a few tears over many night in the hut next door.

One day Pete and I had been to the softball game which took place a couple of times per week and were driving in a dark blue pickup truck out towards what is now called Two Boats, when we both agreed that it would be a good idea for me to have a go at driving. We'd both had a couple of cans that afternoon so everything seemed hilarious especially when I got behind the wheel.

The vehicles from the US base were of course all American and therefore left hand drive. Now this didn't help in that we were on effectively British roads in an American truck with a driver who'd only ever driven tractors on fields in Hertfordshire. The journey to Two Boats was an adventure in itself with a bit of “ off road work” thrown in as well as wrong side of the main highway driving. An hour or so later we finally made it down to the main beach area where there was a full blown Bar B Q in full cry and us arriving in a madly driven vehicle that slewed to a halt in a cloud of brownie, red and possibly black dust wasn't our finest moment. The situation was saved apparently by me standing on a table with a beer in one hand and a burger in the other singing “The Star Spangled Banner”. I still have no recollection of the words but it stopped a blood bath at the time. All of the blame was put on me and so Pete kept his job as the base admin assistant and I was in serious pooh with the Navy on the basis that I was asleep under my bed when they finally located me. I didn't know! We never did let on that I was behind the wheel of the truck.

One day Pete said he was having problems on the logistics of where to allocate bunks, sleeping accommodation, food details and the like as there was to be a missile launch coming up shortly and this was indeed part of the moon landing programme which meant that a whole bunch of people from Florida were due to arrive. This didn't mean an awful lot to us as we only lived on the base and had nothing to do with the NASA programme. Shortly after this I was talking to one of the yanks in the club and he remarked that his workload had increased dramatically. Unthinkingly I remarked in all innocence that I supposed it was because of the impending influx of staff from NASA for the moon shot. He said little else about it and off he went. The next day there was a very chilly feel to relationships with Uncle Sam's finest. A particularly big guy cornered me outside the PX and wanted to know what info we held on the US moon landing programme. He didn't seem all that convinced that I'd supposedly overheard somebody talking about it in the club sometime before. I'm sure he

was carrying a piece. The questions came from two or three others over the next day or so, I just pleaded ignorance when one of them asked “What do you radio guys really get up to in your station. We’re not convinced it’s a telegram relay station as you put it.”

One guy sidled up to me and out of the side of his mouth he whispered – GUHOR – and grinned and as he left he murmured that he was in the same business as us and had been stationed in Europe. GUHOR was a Russian word that came up almost every day. I grinned, he winked – he was the only one who had any idea why we as the Navy were stationed on a remote island in the middle of the South Atlantic. Eavesdropping, that’s what we did for a living !!!!!

What made me grin was that we sent copies of all of our work to Langley, Virginia in the United States - CIA headquarters – on a daily basis. I actually received a “commendation” from the cipher boys at Langley who wanted me to stay on what was one of the busiest circuits in west and central Africa . They apparently liked my accuracy , funnily enough they only knew me by way of a number – the last three digits of my official number was what I used I never did let on to Peter as to what had happened, I’m sure he would have panicked and then given the game away and that would be the end of his working for Uncle Sam. Working on the rock for the Saints was a big deal as employment back home was pretty abysmal and represented high earnings and money to be sent back to keep their families. The tour on the rock was for two years straight, no leave just work. They all came back whenever they could.

The one place where everyone came together was on the softball pitch/field. I say field on the basis that is where generally Softball is played, now it has to be remembered that ASN doesn’t have “fields” it has flattened areas of lava flows where recreation can take place.

Every weekend and bank holiday the Yanks played Softball (a slower form of their national pastime – baseball) on the” field” just off the road to 2 Boats. Here the whole area had been set up with all of the accoutrements of the great game – a pitcher’s mound, bases set at 90 feet apart, a huge permanent catch fence behind the catcher and last but not least the stands for both spectators and players alike.

Anyone could turn up and from the assembled company the teams were selected and then on with the game. I had played a lot before whilst in Singapore so had a working idea of how the game was played – boy was I rusty when it came to actually playing. I think I was selected more for the curiosity value than anything else as most of the yanks hadn’t seen an Englishman playing what was their national game. From day one I always managed to get selected to play for PAN AM – I don’t think they had enough people that’s why I managed to get a game. Having said all of that it was great fun and something totally different from the every day job. I remember getting a message delivered to me by Fred – “Someone called Zeke wants you to play for PAN AM this afternoon, they’ll pick you up outside the commissary. I hope you understand that” said Fred. He actually seemed a bit miffed that one of the Yanks had had the temerity to phone our office, but really I think it was because he didn’t know what was going on.

I played as often as I could and only slowly improved over the course of the year but at least I enjoyed being out in the open air and getting a fair bit of exercise plus being in the company of people other than Piper and co. A guy called Prince (his surname) was always

the pitcher for one of the sides usually the opposite one from mine which was a great pity because I only managed to hit one of his deliveries every so often. He was FFFFAAAAASSST and I wasn't. The brain could see what was happening, it told the arms to move, the ball went hammering past the arms then engaged and lo and behold – another strike against yours truly. The only saving grace was that a lot of the Americans were struck out by the mighty Prince as well as yours truly.

FOOD

From the first day of arrival on the Rock the big preoccupation was with food. We thought that the Navy served up to us wasn't half bad, that is until we checked in to the mess hall on the day of touch down. None of us had seen such an array of goodies and as we'd arrived at the weekend steak was being served. The steaks were enormous and came in three types well done, medium or rare but all had been precooked to those standards. We didn't know that steaks were that size even though I'd eaten pretty darned well in Singapore many years previously.

What we hadn't appreciated was that we had to sign for our meals, in fact with the Yanks we had to sign for everything if a service was being provided. Nelson I must say had more meals than was good for him. In fact so long as we put RN somewhere on the clip board nobody cared what name we entered.

Every day four meals were served with the fourth being a reprise of breakfast but served from 2100 until the mess hall was empty. I should just add that the one product that was almost impossible to overdose on was sugar. That put out on the tables was in little packets and severely rationed – they even then were trying to stop people from being obese on the one hand but serving four giant meals per day on the other hand. Breakfast was the one great meal that I've ever come across anywhere in the world and has to be described. As we entered the mess hall we lined up to first sign in then join the queue for the eggs the cook/chef. Now he would start taking orders for eggs six back from the man at the front of the line yelling out how did you want them and how many? You could in theory have as many eggs as you wanted but 2 was norm, but then they were fried sunny side up, easy over or just shown the heat, and by the time you arrived your eggs were waiting. The next section had a container of scrambled eggs, closely followed by the bacon section – again three types of bacon from nicely cooked to shatter. American flapjacks were a must and there was either hot syrup or hot butter to pour over them.

Fruit juices were next followed by fresh fruit all served in ice e.g. apples, whole bunches of grapes blue or white. Toast was next on the list but the bread was typically American and was to us like Nimble but still we took it. Cereal was there if you wanted it and this was accompanied by reconstituted milk which has to be tried to be believed. Finally you could make a cup of tea using American tea bags (they still don't know what is good and what is not bless them). Then there was the beverage of the gods – COFFEE, This was served from enormous vats of either black/brown or black treacle like brew – I loved the second type but it was then a big trawl around for the sugar. Lastly there was either iced tea or iced coffee alongside fresh orange juice. How we didn't put on any weight whatsoever I will never know. I suppose it was because we went swimming every day in the sea and I

played softball at the weekends and walked wherever I could . Forgot to say that SALT was also hard to come by in any quantity. It was great.

Murder most foul

It was the 3rd July 1963 and I was working up until 2200 so arrived late in the proceedings at the Volcano Club. A party was in full swing and the place was packed. Why ? I wondered, then the penny dropped – tomorrow was to be the Fourth of July. Independence Day for the colonies and here we were celebrating with them. Fate is an odd mistress.

We walked in to be greeted by Big Jason (I never did know his full name) who charged forward armed with four drinks in his hands two of which were for me for some reason. This was the first time that I'd ever drunk a Cuba Libre and in fact the first time that I'd even heard of it. A nice drink which I've repeated on many an occasion since that fateful night.

The evening wore on and around 0030 we were all requested to leave the Club and "go home" which effectively meant that we all went outside and sat in the dust just talking and joking. Jason was there and he'd managed to buy a bottle of scotch and all of us were invited back to his place for a nightcap.

All of a sudden there was one hell of a scuffle going on, with fists, feet and heads crashing in all directions. In the middle of this melee was Jason slugging the bejessus out of somebody. Everyone dived in to separate the two protagonists and order was restored. Time to go and so we all went our separate ways feeling merry and bright. That was the last time that I was to see Jason.

The daytime following the night before wasn't so good especially when we were awakened by one of the mess boys saying that Jason was dead. Now there's nothing quite like the announcement that someone you knew was now dead to shake you into total consciousness. It did big time. Apparently the other guy in the punch up was Jason's room mate who was now in custody charged with murder. Jason had been found with his head severed from his body, blood everywhere and bloody footprints leading to his roomies locker in which was a fishing knife with a one foot long blade all covered in blood. "What me chief, don't know anything about it" was the general drift of his immediate defence when questioned. This guy was put in the one and only gaol cell on the island in the capitol Georgetown and Jason was put into the deep freeze on the base. The whole of the base was in deep mourning that 4th of July. None of the Yanks went near the club and very few went for meals and if they did then any conversation was very muted. What followed was the stuff of the old black and white Ealing comedies. The island was a British overseas territory and fully administered by the people of St Helena some 750 miles off to the southwest but the manager of the Cable and Wireless Company was the local magistrate and therefore all was under his jurisdiction The base however was leased to the US and therefore anything that happened with their personnel on the base came under their control. The Americans said no, the Brits said it did and so a stalemate existed – nobody wanted the odious task of putting on a trial.

Eventually a compromise was effected. He would be tried under English Law before a panel of three worthy souls but he would have a Canadian barrister to represent him during the trial. The island did not have any permanent or indigenous people so there could not be a jury therefore it was agreed that the C&W man, a retired judge from England and Fred Mills would hear the case and pass judgement at the appropriate time. An inspector of the St Helena police force arrived by ship some weeks after the murder and started taking statements and thus we were dragged into the whole matter much to the trepidation of Fred. Statements were taken and a court appearance date set down and we were advised that we would be called as prosecution witnesses – four of our merry band. The next problem was where the trial was to take place ASN didn't have a court house so the largest public building was co opted in to service – the Cinema was the choice on the basis that only the odd matinee would be affected but not the evening sessions. Came the day of our appearance in court and our company of four dressed in formal navy whites, presented ourselves at the “court” ready for the action to start. We were given a pep talk by our masters to the effect that we were to answer all questions to the letter and not to start embellishing the tales of the night. I was called and duly marched into the cinema (we'd been sitting outside in The sunlight just “chilling out” to mix metaphors) strode into the most Enormous witness box. Immediately in front of me on the ledge around the Box was a huge knife that to all intents and purposes was rusty except that The rust was dried blood. Just to one side was a bloodstained blanket and articles of clothing. I took the oath and from the corner of my eye I could see Fred looking at best weary as I was the fourth of the witnesses to be called and after my evidence was given I found out why. I was grilled over my statement which only really said that I saw 2 drunken blokes trying to clobber each other which stopped several of us going back to Jason's cabin for a nightcap of the scotch that he'd bought earlier that evening. Fred actually looked close to tears at that stage. He didn't actually speak to us for a couple of days after the trial. The upshot of all of this was that the man was found guilty and sentenced to eight years in Lincoln prison and was flown out on the next available plane. Jason's brother had flown over from the states to attend the trial and he was almost a carbon copy of his brother. The irony of it all was that he was a sheriff in some town in Texas.

Apparently this guy had been found guilty in his home state of Texas of violence but not been sent to jail but this had not been picked up on the personnel screening carried out by PAN AM for all people serving on the range.

The base returned to normal and everyone settled back to enjoy the carefree laid back lifestyle that we were all enjoying when approximately three weeks after the trial another yank picked up a dinner knife, pointed it at the guy sat opposite him in the mess hall and muttered sum oath. He was reported immediately to the base manager who fired him on the spot. He was a very miserable passenger on the afternoon flight to Florida as he would never get another job like this one.

Life on the island just eased its way along and we progressed from working flat out to eating huge meals to walking and having the odd party or two. Idyllic covers it.

One day a flight of five C130s came in on a major flying exercise for the USAF. They'd been sent from some base in the states along the island chain, into Brazil then on to us before going to South Africa. This happened every so often when they were using some form of tactics when exercising with the island's Connie – a Constellation Aircraft which I remember was the forerunner of the AWACS planes. Each of these flights had a senior officer in charge and this particular one had a full chicken colonel as the boss – funnily he

looked like Colonel Sanders as well, perhaps all colonels in the USAF had to have a role model. Well the C and I met up in the Volcano Club one evening and after several toasts to everyone that we could think of the latter part of the evening became a bit of a blur. So much so that several rousing choruses of some song or other did not get the applause that we'd expect.

The following day I was standing (leaning against the wall really) outside the PX waiting for it to open when that should be walking very gingerly in the other direction but my buddy and pal the colonel. At the same time Fred hove into sight and immediately drew himself up to his full height of 5feet 10 inches and immediately saluted the C in the finest tradition of the RN. The C returned the acknowledgement in the very scruffy way of American salutes but then espied me and beamed "Hi there Brown, that was sure one hell of a party last night. How's the head? Mines killing me" Fred glared at me. I didn't salute but just grimaced and said something to the effect that my eyes weren't functioning that well either. The Colonel laughed and offered me a cigarette and we carried on chatting away much to the annoyance of Fred who had been effectively Dismissed. Later He did have a bit of a moan at me about service protocol and that the finest Traditions of the navy should be upheld at all times and that I should say SIR and Not address the colonel by his rank. Hm!!!! I'm sure the C would have been have been highly amused.

Names are a funny thing really as my name is Peter, to the Navy I was Buster but to the Yanks one and all I was just plain Brown. "Hey Brown, how're doing" – "Hi there Brown you playing today up at the ground" was the inoffensive use of just my surname. Most other times that I was called Brown was when in trouble or by naval officers who forgot to use your rank as a manner in which to address me, which was most of the time.

Things to do

We made our own entertainment about 90% of the time with the rest coming from the occasional film or being invited to join the Yanks at a Bar B Q down on the beach. That brings me to the story behind the beaches .We were only allowed to swim from two beaches on the whole island as the rest were considered to be too dangerous because of the currents and just as importantly – Sharks.

The island administrator, who was also the local law/justice had decreed that the beaches were out of bounds for the purposes of swimming and if caught there was an immediate fine of £20. This was in the days when £20 was a lot of money and came out as about a week's pay to us so we tried not to get caught. The larger of the two beaches was English Bay and slightly nearer to Georgetown and the other was Comfortless Cove. Now if ever there was a more aptly named place I've yet to come across it.

The beach wasn't very big at all and was at the end of a long inlet from the sea so was protected from the larger waves of the South Atlantic. Here it was where we went swimming five days out of the seven. The water was crystal clear and warm and when the sun beat down it was a superb beach just to walk up and down



“On the way back from Comfortless Cove”

On the downside it got its name from the fact that when ships came sailing by in days gone by they would leave in this tiny bay any poor soul who had contracted Yellow Fever or any other nasty disease that could be imagined, to fend for themselves. They were left with provisions and casks of water and the small graveyard set back from the beach in a small hollow shows that not a lot of hapless mariners survived to tell the tale. Some were incredibly young, barely into their teens. There was a bull ring set into one of the rocks and it was here that the jolly boats would secure and not come further towards the shore. We all thought that we were pretty good swimmers and took to swimming as far along a large submarine cable that came ashore at CC as we could. Brave souls were we until one day there was this yell from out in front of us and a huge splashing and thrashing of arms. Tom Cowan came back past us barely in the water and goodness knows what speed he was doing as he hit the beach. All that we heard was BBAAAAARRRRRRRAAAAACCCCUUUUUUUDDAA. Tom had come face to face with a small shoal of these slim line predators and decided that sun bathing on the beach was for him and no more of the Jacques Coustea for him. It took us ages to persuade him to go swimming again – I mean days, not just that afternoon.





“Comfortless Cove with Cross Hill behind”

One day after the incident with the donkey giving birth with the aid of us, the vet and his land rover we were invited to spend the afternoon up on the top of Green Mountain by the vet and his family. Fred got to hear of this and the instructions came down that we had to be well dressed, well behaved and not to embarrass the Navy – now would we, us of all people didn't the man have any trust ????????????

We commandeered one of the Land Rovers and set off for the top of the Island all feeling happy and bright that is until we came to the switch back road. Our LR was of the long wheelbase configuration which meant that we had to do a three point turn on each of the corners which wouldn't have minded except that there were no crash barriers and each drop was some twenty feet. we were met at the Red Lion which had, during the Napoleonic era been the local hostelry for the small garrison of Marines and their families who lived in and around that part of the island. Some actually lived in houses hewn from the lava flows themselves – they were really tough cookies. Sadly the building was in decline when we saw it so I wouldn't hold out any hope for it being there now.

Our chum the vet was there to greet, his name was Peter the rest I've long since forgotten, and it turned out that he was the only farmer on the whole of ASN. He farmed with several heaps of chickens, there were Tamworth pigs laying around everywhere. Their reddish skin protected them from the harsh sunlight and so they thrived.

Peter lived there with his wife and they ran a very successful farming operation and were of course the only source of fresh produce, everything else was brought in by ship and plane.

He lived in a beautiful old building known as the Residence which was a real piece of colonial Britain at its best which had the most magnificent views over the island.

We were given the real guided tour of the top of the island. We entered what would be described as an English forest glade, then through a wicket gate into a banana grove, then on into a small fir copse. The whole of this part of the island had been used as an experimental horticultural site by Kew gardens at some stage.

The last agricultural endeavour had been during WW11 when crops had been grown by the Yanks using hydroponics as a means of cultivation but again this method had long since been forgotten and abandoned. Only the derelict beds remained.

Peter and his wife looked after us well, we had lunch then afternoon tea in the best English tradition but before that he'd put on a competition for us. From somewhere he'd managed to round up six .22 bore rifles and heaps of ammo and set up a 25 yard shooting range in one of the glades. As usual I wasn't all that good until it was my turn to use the Winchester then I could have taken on the world getting a near perfect score. I think I'd been watching too many westerns even then.

A DJ is born

ASN had its own radio station fully paid for by PAN AM (or the USAF I was never quite sure as to who owned it) and whilst this was a local radio for the island it had a massive range for it had been picked up in Portugal. It was most certainly heard in West Africa and South America. What was strange was that Volcano Radio had no permanent staff whether military or civilian everything was run for and behalf of those who were interested in it.

This was my opportunity or so I thought to enter the big time of broadcasting on an international scale mind you any scale was agreeable. The set up of the radio room was fabulous. The operator was sat in his own studio behind a sound proof glass wall. There was hanging down from the ceiling a huge microphone for the DJ's use. He had all of the controls in front of him for mixing, volume output, cut in or off etc. To start with there were three turntables, a record deck loaded up with 12 LP's which kicked in at midnight and when they had finished there were 2 three hour tapes to take over. Hopefully someone would turn up before the tapes ran out and start Off the breakfast show.

Having seen all of this I was hooked. I wanted in so approached one of the Radio boys and they said that they had two slots coming up shortly which I could take if I wanted to. They were 2000 – 2200 on Wednesday and Saturday. Yep said I." just give me some warning so that I can train up a bit". The next Day came the call as the guy I was to replace was catching an earlier plane home. So there I was with no experience, no training and a 2 hour slot to fill – in I Went boots and all. Boy do you learn quickly when you have to. I sat there wearing the state of the art headphones which in those days were stereo WOW looking a bit like a goldfish to anyone who came in to the station to view. Boy did we think we were the bees knees.

Two hours Later I came out of there absolutely drained. I'd decided even before arriving that I'd try to mix and match all of my music And so played the top20, jazz, country and western, classics in other words anything that came to mind or hand. There were racks of LP's in fact they 1200 and some 3000 singles to choose From. Every week AFRTS (American Forces Radio and Television Service) would send in an LP which had the current top 20 for that week. The beauty of the radio station was that you could organise any programme that suited you personally it didn't have to be music you could just sit there and chat if that was what you wanted to do. Piper and his cronies decided That they were going to take a slot one evening and entertain us all. I really hadn't heard so much mindless drivel in my life they were trying t be a mix between the Goons and the Cambridge Footlights. They did not succeed – funny they were not, embarrassing they were in shed loads. They didn't last very long in their spot as they were asked to stop. I had a great time and made some nice friends who rang in saying they liked the show – including the base manager Len Schluder.

Flora & Fauna

Thousands of words have been written about the creatures that live on ASN so I will not try to emulate them or improve on what's' been said by some of the great minds of the world. One or two living things had an effect on us whilst there one of which was the tale of the donkey and how we played midwife to the birth spoken of earlier. We'd like to explore the island and try to find some part of the island that no man had trodden on before which is not possible when the whole place is only 7 x 5 miles in area. So it was one day that a few of us set out to explore the mountain starting from the base and clawing our way up the scree covered slopes on to the more green covered flats.

We made it after quite some time and ended up walking across what seemed to be flat areas covered in short gorse. The gorse was a pretty tough grass that could cut like hell if you didn't watch out. Across these little flats were tracks that had been made by either the sheep or the wild donkeys so off we went on the basis that if those creatures could make it so could we. One of our intrepid band was a Geordie by the name of George and it was as he slowed down on one of these tracks that out of the scrub grass shot an enormous claw This claw didn't quite take hold of Georges ankle but was sharp enough to Slash through a pair of walking socks as well as an ordinary pair under them. The claw didn't cut his skin at all which was a relief to us all. The slashing had been given by one of ASN's famous land crabs. They were noted to kill anything that came past their hidey hole including us, mainly they caught rabbits and they fed on carrion so it was well known that their claws were covered in virtually every disease known to man. George still checked in with the doctor later that day – don't blame him either.

The island was not noted for its creepy crawlies except for two horror stories. One was a giant Cockroach like creature that only came out into the open about twice a year and I was there when they did. These creatures covered everything in great masses including doorframes which was a bit off putting especially as when you went through they would leap on you. This rash of CR's only lasted about two weeks at a time before they disappeared for another few months.

The other creature that I almost became paranoid about was the Centipede. This was no ordinary worm with loads of legs and feet. This was a mega sized brute which grew to a foot long and the feet were so big you could hear it marching. One of its favourite places to live was under the benches where the power packs for our RA117 receivers were housed. Believe me when I say that one of these creatures suddenly crawling across your feet or up your leg when you least expect the same scares the living daylights out of you. On the nights that we stayed in the radio centre we slept in a standard military issue bed. Comfortable – just about. It was the citing of the bed that was important so that none of the crossbeams were over the top of you. Centipedes liked walking across these beams and occasionally fell off so position was everything.

ASN is famous for the annual visit of the big Green Turtles for the big egg laying sessions and though these giant creatures came ashore evidence of their visit was everywhere. When we first saw their tracks across the beach we couldn't work it out at all. There were dual lines that looked like a caterpillar tractor or a tank had miraculously come out of the sea and then disappeared into the dunes. It was only after that that we would go down to the beach to watch these magnificent creatures haul themselves in the most ungainly manner across the sand. Pity I never got to see them swimming.

Sometime later came the hatching out of the eggs and the migration of the tiny baby turtles from out of the sand and across the beach down to the safety of the sea and away. Hm !!!! It didn't happen quite like that. We watched as the turtles dug themselves out of the sand and then flapped and fell and dragged themselves in hordes across the beach only to watch in horror as the gulls swooped down to pick them out for their lunch. Hundreds were eaten and only a few made it to the surf. The few who made it didn't last long because of the fish waiting in the shallow water. These fish were flat, black but with five bright blue stripes on the sides but of even more importance were the two thumping great teeth sticking out at the front. On land they could have peeled oranges through chicken wire with those choppers.

This then galvanised the Royal Navy to the rescue so armed with our floppy hats which we filled to the brim with squirming turtles we took them down to the mighty Atlantic, jumped up and down in the water to scare off the fish and then poured our cargo into the briny. What was so incredible was that these little creatures had just dug themselves out of the sand and could swim immediately our cheers after having defeated the predators was short lived as one by one the little heads suddenly disappeared under the waves never to surface and out of say 100 baby turtles that we'd tried to help probably only five had made it. Still that was probably four more than in the normal course of nature.

We felt good about it no matter what had happened. Pity they still had a 1000 miles to swim to Brazil which is where they actually live between the mating seasons. Down by the sea children will be children and none more so than a bunch of sailors walking in the rock pools and generally playing with everything in sight. Now our chum George had inexplicably found a bit of driftwood that was in reality a wooden baseball bat (Broken). Feeling well armed and invulnerable George proceeded to poke the bat into every nook and cranny that he could find. Sending small fish and crabs dashing in all directions George nearly jumped out of his skin when a Moray Eel suddenly hurled out of a hole and took a huge chunk out of the end of the bat. What is more it came back for a second bite and George wasn't quick enough then either as another piece of the bat was shredded. After that the need to explore receded somewhat.



The Job or Why were we there

As I pointed out at the beginning of this section this had been the only draft that I'd been given that was specifically for one purpose and one purpose only. Interception of CW signals from other countries military operations. In other words we were to spy on the neighbouring countries. Actually the nearest country to us was Brazil but apparently they didn't seem to be a risk. So our attention was directed to the east of us – Africa. Nearly every country that we listened out for used the Morse code either entirely or in conjunction with a voice circuit which instead of being written down manually was recorded for translation at a later date. That reminds me that at our last briefing before we left Tangmere some additional Naval types had turned up asking very pointedly “ do any of you lot speak either French or Spanish “ . There being nil response they put their papers away and left looking quite miffed.

One thing was noticeable on several of the circuits was that at the end of a transmission the operator at the receiving end would acknowledge and then re send the whole message over again to make sure that he'd received it Correctly. This meant that we had a total double check and that decryption of the signal by military Intelligence was made easier.

I had two circuits that I virtually specialised on. One was an Air force fighter Area and the second was Naval both ocean going and river patrol. The River Patrol only operated for part of the year which was after the annual flooding The call sign was DN6. Maybe it was a large patrol boat on a very large river or there again maybe not.

Some of the other material that was gathered was Ambassadorial traffic but this was less exciting than tracking aircraft and ship movements. The signal traffic levels were quite high and there were days when I remember having to call out to the CRS to load up new

signal pads with carbons as I couldn't keep up. Every signal was taken down by hand and logged and we were only allowed to use black biros, the carbons on the other hand were bright blue. Never did understand the logic of that system.

The Journey Back

The time to finish our tour duty was suddenly upon us and so it was with great sadness and regret that we started to get ourselves organised ready to leave. There wasn't really a lot to do other than pack our kit and wait for the arrival of the relief crew so we decided that we ought to say goodbye to everyone all in one big go. We threw a party. Now there was nowhere to purchase any food or crisps or to make nibbles so it was off to see our buddies in the commissary. We gave them a bottle of Bacardi and they supplied us with all the food and goodies that we'd need – cold meats, cheeses, fresh salads the list went on. Two days before our departure we'd arranged for our guests to arrive at dusk in a room that we'd managed to commandeer. We turned out in crispy ironed shirts freshly laundered Chinos and all in all we looked a pretty decent bunch. Len even remarked on how well the whole affair was going and he really liked the commissary food that we had laid on for one and all. We feigned total innocence of any wrongdoing and made sure that everyone was catered for in the best traditions of the Royal Navy. It was the last time that we would see Schlitz (The beer that made Milwaukee famous) for quite some time, Budweiser was still not popular in England at that time as was Michelob. These were the beers we had available and in quantity as well as anything else that was wanted. The evening wore on the drinks flowed faster and the music and conversation grew louder by the minute. Schluder couldn't get used to the idea that we weren't about to wreck the place in a drunken brawl. So we did the next best thing we got Schluder as tight as lord and he ended up with all of the rest of us and his people all joining in with a good Zorba the Greek session. They still asked as to how we knew about the Apollo missions and we still lied our way through very convincingly.

The day before we left we were all mustered with our leader Fred who made a great fuss about us actually drawing some of our money and insisted that we all flew home with £50 in our pockets. He was conscious that we had all tried to save our pay and he wanted us to now enjoy some of it. We did! Our relief crew arrived in an RAF flight, but especially in a twin boomed machine called an ARGOSY which had all mod cons like proper airline seats and joy of joy it was pressurised. The only downside to all of this was that the personnel were all Blue Jobs, Brylcreem Boys in other words they were in the RAF. How could they in the military send these people to relieve us, what had they got to offer the world we wondered – what had possessed them to make such a decision. The Yanks walked around muttering how it had taken them nearly a year to get used to us so what were they going to be like and would they be able to live up to what we were leaving (nice of them to say that actually). We of course being true sailors advised them of every pitfall and shortcomings that these RAF would offer.

A few guys came to see us off but as it was only 0600 nobody was in a particularly joyous mood. We sat there the engines revved, we sat there a little longer and still the engines revved. We taxied back to the control hut got out and waited. Evidently the flight crew weren't happy with something like the temperature and the humidity and it was pitch black as they felt that they wouldn't be able to effect a successful take off. We were with them all the

way we wanted everything to be successful in the leaving the ground Department. The other thing that the pilots weren't at all happy with was the BUMP. This is totally peculiar to Wideawake airfield in that half way down the runway there was a bump that meant that the other end was lost to sight just when the plane was barrelling along at full revs. The other thing that put people off on their first visit to ASN was that there were two skeletons of aircraft that had crashed during or just after WW11 when the island was a USAF Base in the proper sense of the word. Secondly there was one of the many volcanic vents (dormant)right at the Very end of the runway which could have made life difficult in an emergency.

Finally some two hours later we finally made the take off and so it was that we left one of the strangest places on earth that naval personnel would serve. To a man we were glued to the windows looking down on a place that had been home for a year and that had no real connection with the outside world. No more would we speak of places with such odd sounding names – Garrison (the islands Capitol) English Bay Comfortless Cove The Three Sisters Red Hill Cross Hill The Dew Pond Green Mountain Wideawake Fair Mars Bay Two Boats Breakneck Valley The Devil's Ashpit, The Devils Riding School and Cricket Valley, Dead Man's Beach and many more. Apart from George everyone had liked their stay on this remote heap of clinker. Me I'd Loved every minute of the place and my work, which was never to be repeated. Still that's the navy life we move on all of the time, once described as military gypsies. I hope that we left our mark .

It apparently took the ARGOSY another hour to get above 1500 feet according to the flight crew and again it was all to do with the humidity levels, well that's what they said and as they were driving this infernal machine who was I to question them?? Some five hours later we circled then landed in Freetown, Sierra Leone for more engine juice and for us all to stretch our legs which was about all we could accomplish in the time that we were on the ground. Then it was off again to Dakar. Unfortunately for us one of the air crew had gone just slightly overboard and bought a whole arm of bananas which were luxuriating at the rear of the main cabin. We'd started to doze off as we'd another hour or so before the next stop, when one of the blue jobs came along to where I was sitting/sleeping and asked me if I'd like to lift my feet up as there was fairly large banana spider directly by my feet. Now at this stage I must confess that the pet hatred of mine are spiders whether big, small, round, hairy or otherwise I go several shades of green when one of these things is within six feet of me let alone to be told that there's a humungous hairy thing right under where I was. I managed to go from semi sleep to wide awake standing on my chair in a micro second. I think I frightened the poor airman almost to death by doing this but I was in total defence mode. They caught the spider and loaded it into a paper cup which the airman brought towards me, I advised him that he would die if he came one step closer. He didn't take that step and the status quo was established. We landed in Dakar and took on fresh supplies of fuel and more importantly food courtesy of Air France and so we ate well that day. Finally we were told that we were going to fly into Gran Canaria for a three day stop over as the flight crews had exceeded their allowable flying time. This we didn't mind one little bit. We were suntanned, young and more importantly hadn't been in female company for a year – Now that's where serious amounts of Hormones go berserk – YYYIIIIIPPPPPPEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE.

Due to the two stopovers and the general speed of our aircraft we came in to land when it was pitch black. The runway was marked with oil lamps with a blazing wick on the top that made them look like comic book bombs. We were parked away from the civil part of the airport in the military compound I suppose the roundel on the side and wings would have given it away that we weren't a charter flight. The strangest part of it was that we stopped

right in the middle of a whole mass of WW11 bombers – to be precise they were Heinkel 111 models I have since found out and were made under licence from 1940 onwards. Nevertheless it was an eerie feeling of going back in time especially when a sentry sporting a submachine gun crunched in to sight (we were on another volcanic island so recognised the footfall).

We stayed on the island for three days R&R and then it was off again for an overnight stop at Gibraltar before the final leg of our journey back to England.

Arriving back in England after a long time away was always at first exciting but it was only after the glamour of the return had faded and everyone would say “you look brown” and when are you going back that you began to notice yet again just how scruffy dear old England was. The worst thing of all was litter, it was everywhere and I still don’t know to this day why so many people paid so much money to come and look at a rubbish tip.

Back to the arrival – we touched down at RAF Benson in Oxfordshire sometime in the early afternoon and happily carried our own bags into the arrival area. All euphoria was immediately dashed when we were confronted by a man in a black suit and peaked cap. “I was expecting you over 24 hours ago” said the man from Customs and Excise and he didn’t look at all happy.

After the usual “anything to declare” and our confirmation that we didn’t have any such contraband that he might be looking for, our man from the ministry pointed to our suitcases. “Those are subject to duty” he sniffed (I’m sure he sniffed, well anyway he looked as though he would). We’d never heard of suitcases being subject to duty until now when he advised that these were considered to be luxury items.

What had happened was that we saw these cases in the PX on Ascension, thought they were a bit nice and so to a man bought at least one each. We’d purchased Samsonite cases which were of aluminium construction and weighed in at 10lbs each (no good for modern air travel), we had absolutely no idea that they were considered to be luxury goods and so argued the point. He didn’t listen and we ended up paying £1.50 duty and were given our pink slip. The purchase price on the island had been \$35 which with an exchange rate of \$2.82 to the pound we’d made a pretty good purchase it would seem. We milled around outside until our coach turned up, said our farewells to both Fred and the man from GCHQ (I think his name was King) as they were taking another route and so we all left. Sad to see my mate Tom Cowan go but I only met him one other time but heard several years later that he was working for Walls Sausages doing what I have no idea. As for the others I didn’t come across them again during my naval career thankfully as I had found them the most insular bunch going. They just didn’t join in with the people on the island and resented the fact that I did- Still I’d enjoyed myself and they didn’t

1964–The Year of the LIZ

This was the year when my whole life and outlook on same was to change. About two days after I'd arrived home on leave I contacted Brian Medlock to see if he and all the Hoddesdon gang still met up a Friday night for a beer at The Bull. As the answer had been in the affirmative it was agreed that Brian would pick me up which he duly did and I reunited with about a dozen of them. "We're going for dinner at the Cowpers Arms tomorrow, do you want to come and can you bring a bird?" Yes and no I can't bring a bird. I don't know any and I've only been back in the country for 3 days". I was duly told not to bother as they'd fix me up. Tony Philips picked me up in his dad's white Cortina Mk2 and off we went to enjoy a nice dinner at the Cowpers. I'd been sat next to a small good looking piece and there I'd stayed for the evening. She was nice I'd thought, and it was only after we'd dropped her off at her house that Tony asked me what I thought of my date. I hadn't actually been formally introduced to Liz and because of the way that the conversation had gone I thought she was someone else's girlfriend." Idiot "he said, and so it was that I had to phone Liz the following day to ask her for a date – thankfully she said yes and 42 years later she still thinks I'm a pratt.

We started seeing a lot of each other from that moment on and I thought that being on leave wasn't quite so bad after all – sorry if that sounds cruel but my parents were still arguing and fighting over the most trivial matters. Part way through my draft chit arrived in the usual brown envelope and I couldn't for the life of me bring myself to open it as I quite clearly feared the worst. What was it to be – the FES again, The Med or even worse The Home Station which meant that you could be in home waters and then actually manage to get home about twice per year. "Courage mon brave" I could hear the world urging, open the envelope let's get it over with, Where are your brilliant services now required. Are there Countries to overthrow, are there still people to eavesdrop ?????

WHITEHALL W/T it said. London, near to home, no ploughing across the oceans they the Lords of the Admiralty had nowhere else to send me as even then they were running out of posts for us EW comms ratings but before that I was to attend Mercury for my LRO's course which I did and passed. Now Admiralty W/T station Whitehall is situated below ground at the Citadel end of the main building overlooking Horseguards. The way in is either through and over the parade ground where the trooping of the colour takes place every year or more to the point through a small doorway that is accessed from a small road behind and to one side of Admiralty Arch. This to me was to be heaven once the ubiquitous joining routine had been accomplished. I checked with the main office as to whether or not I could live at home and was advised that provided that my home accommodation was within a radius on their map all would be o.k. Now the tape that they measured the distances with was prone to stretching and by dint of pulling and pushing, my parents house was all of a quarter of an inch within the acceptable radius. More likely it was an inch out to be honest but nobody was to check. This meant that I was free to come and go as I pleased when off duty and Nobody would know where in the world I was. This was the ultimate in a job with shift work as the civilians would have said. The beauty of the whole shift pattern was that I could plan ahead for six months at a time and strangely Liz entered into the navy way of thinking. If there was some form of social event with the others she would mostly stay at home if I was to be on either late or early shifts (watches). I must admit that I spent more time with Liz than I did at home.

In fact the circumstances that Liz lived in were far superior to my own with her parents living in a big house with a large garden etc..More of this later. I started off travelling backwards and forwards to Whitehall by train which was very convenient in that the station was only about 400 yds from my house and secondly the watch pattern meant that I was always travelling in the opposite direction to all of the commuters. This only got a bit hairy on Liverpool Street Station when trying to catch my 0817 train to Cheshunt – I would be going in one direction and whole train loads of people would be heaving and pushing in the other direction. We all made it every time. My weekly railway season ticket cost 19/6d which at the time seemed to be a fortune.

A draft to Whitehall W/T was considered by many to be a plum posting as other than you turning up for work on time all you had to do was draw you London allowance and keep out of trouble. When I first arrived at Whitehall I was issued with a security pass which was one of those that if the outer cover was broken it would immediately change colour and more importantly you wouldn't be allowed in. I only saw it happen once and thankfully not to me. The Security police were generally nice people but if you didn't have your pass with you just wouldn't let you in even if you showed your Naval ID card, your birth certificate, pictures of your family. They would stand and talk to you until someone from the Comcen came to your rescue and then with a smile they would let you in. By this time the guy you were due to re leave had missed his train and was seriously pissed off.

The work, some two or three stories down, was fantastic. Every communication section was a teleprinter hook up with the exception of one circuit – GBR the Submarine broadcast and this was high speed Morse circuit but even then this was actioned by running a paper tape through a Morse reading head. This was also a circuit that ran continuously both at normal speed and at super high speed and was a monster to keep up with because if there was too much traffic you could easily over run a four hour sending schedule. I spent some time on this circuit as well as the telegram relay and most often the incoming circuit from Singapore – FX 6.

This was a case of de ja vous as I was now at the receiving end of all of the traffic Singapore station at Kranji. Still it worked most of the time until the atmospheric conditions cut them off from the rest of the world yet again. It was at this point that there was absolutely nothing that you could do about it other than to have another cup of tea.

I was eventually moved to the new circuit from Mauritius which punched out signals At the speed of 75 words per minute not the by now pedestrian speed of 45 wpm that we had been used to. The particular bay that dealt with this signal input had Four teleprinters (2 in and 2 Out) . This meant that if a signal was being received on one then the next was diverted to the other machine. Easy you might Think except that each signal had to be logged in manually on a signal pad. The 5 unit code tape wound up and then attached to the original signal with a pin. The resultant snakes nest of paper was then re addressed and sent on to the appropriate recipient by way of another high speed teleprinter link. I had to re address as well deal with the other incoming signals. As well as this I then had to send out traffic after having first logged it in manually on the signal pad. There was no let up from the pace of this and it could and did carry on for hours At a time.

This circuit was usually saved for the lunatic fringe by all accounts. One afternoon that was midweek and therefore particularly busy I had fallen Just a bit behind because of the sheer volume of work made especially difficult By the numbers of redirected signals. I carried on in the best tradition of the Navy – I made a lot of noise, most of it swearing by all accounts – and I must Have had at least 10 signal tapes hanging round my neck to be sent, I was rolling up another , logging in more on the 2 receiving end and generally in a state of Sheer mayhem. It was at this point that the duty day CRS appeared at the huge table that constituted the Mauritius bay – me – and asked if all was ok. I Invited the Chief to help rather than asking stupid “F*****G” questions when I noticed a line of young fresh faced WRNS standing just to one side with another Charming young 3rd Officer trying to keep a straight face whilst she said that this was the sort of pandemonium that these girls would expect to cope with if they were to be drafted to Whitehall.

I blushed believe it or not, because in those days when the sailors ability to Swear was the stuff of legends there was one thing that was almost sacred. You didn't Swear or use foul language in front of the girls. Not often that I felt like an absolute pratt but this was one of those days – so there was nothing for it but to keep on swearing. I'm not sure that I did but it was fun to think of. There came a time when each member of the comms staff was given a whole 72 hours away from the rigours of the Comcen and to achieve this the RSOW would usually assign you to the internal PBX switch board. My turn on the monster came and so with the minimum of training I ended up with a little head set on and me looking at a whole wall of owls eyes, some had numbers, others had symbols. In front of me was an array of switches and a total cat's cradle of plugs on leads.

For the first couple of hours all went reasonably well and then almost as one The whole infernal machine went berserk. The eyelids dropped down, the buzzer was making a noise like a half drowned cat.

I tried, I really did but no matter what every time I cleared one line of eyelids Then the next one started up again. After about 15 minutes of this the patience (for which I am actually not given credit by my family) of Buster Brown cracked I saw the red mist, I saw my hands reaching out, I knew it was wrong but the end of the line for the PBX had been reached. I flipped all of the switches to the Neutral no call position and pulled all of the plugs out. I had beaten the monster.

One of the problems was that one of the links was a permanent line to the Admiralty And the other was to the Chiefs of staff in what had been called at one time the War Office. Apparently it took the OOW quite some time to calm the Brass down. The whole of my watch thought the episode was highly hilarious and so did I at the End of it all. Still nobody was hurt other than a few egos being a bit bruised. Love gets us all in the end.

Liz and I had in reality being going steady as the Americans put it, almost from the day that we first met. The more that we were together the more that I wanted to stay with this beautiful young woman and all of a sudden there was this great dawning. The bolt of lightning hit, the stars exploded and all past conquests were forgotten . I felt sick, I started to daydream in fact Buster the virgin converter was out of the frame – and then the one thing that the male of the species cannot do anything About happened. I fell in love.

Now this is not an easy thing to admit to yourself after the escape from two potential disasters (2 near engagements for life) and a merry life of the debauched young Rake. Jack the Matelot had been beached.

The final knife blow to the heart was administered by LIZ, not me, but LIZ. She said that as it was a leap year she had the privilege of proposing and do you know what, she bloody well did whilst we in the local movie house. Well what could I do, it would have been churlish of me to decline so this gibbering wreck just said yes.

Pop was of the old school and I don't think he'd have spoken to me again if I hadn't requested his daughters hand in marriage. I suppose I could have chosen a slightly better time as he was actually up a ladder when I popped the question to him. He wobbled so did the ladder but he just grinned. Liz's Mum wasn't quite so keen and over a little while did try to put both Liz and me off. She didn't mind the navy but her daughter should marry someone from the wardroom at least. Times changed over the years and Marjorie became a good friend rather than a mother in law.

We announced the engagement to one and all, had a party with friends and then Let it all happen . Marjorie I'm sure checked the calendar and Liz's waistline just to make sure that she wasn't pregnant after all (We had a couple of near misses I remember).

So life took on a different hue and we spent nearly all of our free time together, Until Liz reminded me that as she'd already booked a holiday in Portugal she was going off on this jaunt." No problem" I said until I found out that she was going with three blokes and two other girls – like one each and one of these guys was my arch enemy in the Liz department I was none too happy. She went anyway. Two weeks passed very slowly but came the day of her return I felt great so armed with a dozen red roses I set off on my trusty scooter to welcome her back. Now balancing on a scooter wasn't that easy and this was made even harder by me trying to hold a bunch of red roses between my knees. I arrived at No3 to be greeted by Liz who after two weeks in the Portuguese sun had a fabulous sun tan not dark but more like honey who then proceed to ask me what I wanted as she took the flowers from me. You get a strange feeling when your fiancée greets you in this manner, like why am I here. I mean it was obvious what I wanted – NOOKIE for goodness sake – With my ardour somewhat dampened I soldiered on and was then allowed in. The whole episode was unreal. 806 KNK if said out loud brings vivid memories flooding back. This was the registration detail of my trusty Vespa 125 scooter. Now there was a machine it was not the Mods Lambretta mine was the vehicle of all the Latin lovers that came on to the big screen.

I decided that I must now use this mighty velocipede to get me to work and back as it was rather more direct especially if you happened to miss your main line train and have to wait another 45 minutes for the next one to leave. All went well for weeks until one fateful Sunday morning I left Whitehall in the rain after having just finished an all night watch at the end of my 72. There was hardly any traffic around London at 0815 ish as I trekked off towards Stoke Newington high road and the rain was fairly light. It was as I approached a set of traffic lights that I can remember seeing that the road had been resurfaced and the lane markers had been left in place. They were metal and were now some 1" below the new surface. My front wheel went into this trench and that was the last that I remember until I came to lying in the road with the scooter on top of me but the wrong way round. The engine was screaming, the main light switch had broken and the front guard was bent backwards.

There were some blokes in a hole in the ground who just stood and looked at me as I staggered off with my now bruised machine. The side of my crash hat was a mess and deeply gouged – could have been my head I suppose, but pity the poor road some might say. It took me probably the best part of an hour or even more to make it the last 14/16 miles home I'd never felt so knocked out in my life. My head ached, my left side was bruised in every place possible and my machine would never look pretty again.

I arrived to be met by my father and I said that I'd had a problem and asked him for a cigarette to which he replied that the paper shop was open if I wanted some. I was hobbling at this point but I was damned if the old bastard was going to beat me so I went and bought mine only to discover that he had to go out later because he was running out. Nice guy was my father !!!!

I survived but I had to phone Liz and say that I wouldn't see her that day because I was injured. She didn't know how bad the bruising etc was and I didn't bother her with it at the time. The upshot of this little tale was that I was stopped by the police 10 times in the next six weeks and each time it was because I had my main headlight on. Nowadays all bike riders have their lights on just for self preservation. I was even stooped in the middle of the traffic going round Marble Arch by some Over eager young plod,

I was pulled over for overtaking a police car on a dual Carriageway and threatened with the most dire punishments for not having L Plates that were readable, a headlight that was permanently on and three different Number plates – the letters and numbers had peeled off in different places on each. I think the riding on the pavement to get in to my front garden as being a traffic violation was just a bit over the top and I expressed this view to the plods in the patrol car as to how I felt about their attitude. I was in the pooh again!!! Then it happened – THE DRAFT CHIT arrived I was to go to HMS Devonshire.

The end of the world as I knew it had just fallen around my tiny feet, this I could see would be the end of my engagement and so on. There was no appeal against sentence in those days.

So life changed yet again as I settled in to the routine of life on board one of Her Majesty's powerful gun boat things. This ship was all new navy to me and it was big, so big in fact that when I saw what appeared to be a block of flats in front of me I first thought of desertion. I was a small ship man or at least a man who had served in out of the way places no big ships routine for **me**.



H.M.S.Devonshire – D02

These Few words of mine are of some of the experiences I had whilst serving On the happiest ship in the fleet then and I would bet even now.

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1964 was going along like a train. One minute I'd been quite happy being almost a civilian living at home and just turning up for work at the appointed hour and the next to be catapulted back in to life in the military where everything was done by the book.

So I arrived on board D02 the pennant number for HMS Devonshire the latest in a long line of ships to be given this name. Oddly enough I walked up the brow (navy speak for the gangway) and stepped on board and immediately felt at home. There was a happy atmosphere aboard this vessel which was hard to pin down it was just there. People always smile when you say that such and such ship is a happy one and another has a miserable and unhappy past. How can metal and paint be happy? I have no idea but I can say that you can spot a happy ship from some distance away. Even when I was on the Pre Commission Training course at Mercury, where I was given a pretty intense course on the use of the UA8 and 9 and its associated pieces of apparatus, I'd heard that it was a good ship to be on.



Up to the forward communicators mess deck I went and found to my absolute joy that everyone had a BUNK, no more hammocks to lash and stow – heaven. This mess deck was the largest that I'd ever been in and I soon found that there was actually quite a lot of room unlike many ships when if compared to a pig sty you'd find that the pigs had more room to live in than the sailors themselves.

Devonshire was the first in a new class of ship commissioned to the navy. It was equipped with standard 4.5 inch guns up for'ard but the big stuff was situated down aft – MISSILES which had the most unattractive name allocated to them – Sea Slug. These were the long range radar controlled jobs and made one hell of a racket when they were let loose from the monstrous sized launcher. Along the iron deck and up on to the superstructure were placed the other missile launchers for the hand manoeuvred SEA CAT missiles which were for very short range interceptions. So here I was serving on a DLG of the County Class. Destroyer Large Guided Missile the navy for the use of to be precise.

This was also another of the ships where the EW branch was considered to be a useful and efficient part of the ships armoury. We had to turn to in our own separate very large office to work at the business of localised EW whereby we intercepted all forms of radar

emissions and reported these to the operations Room for their integration into the ships warfare or defence programme. Our equipment was so far advanced and more sophisticated than anything that I'd come across before but once the techniques of handling had been mastered it was great. Radars we" picked up" well beyond the line of sight and so were able to give this info to both the bridge and the ops room for them to log long before they actually had the echoes on the radar repeaters. After a while and especially at night the Ops Room / Bridge would actually start to call down to the office asking if we had anything on our equipment . Nice that someone wanted us.

When not actually required for duties we would where possible attend the BWO and offer any help that we could give in the general communications department.

Shortly after my arrival on board the ship set sail for the pre commission to the Far East missile firing practice area in and around Fishguard and Aberporth in Wales. We weren't allowed in the harbour and so had to park outside the sea wall which if it hadn't been in October it might have been quite pleasant, as it was it was dark and cold a lot of the time. Now there wasn't a lot for us to do in this **neck** of the woods and so it was that I managed to draw the best duty of the lot. We didn't use ships boats but had at our disposal a dockyard MFV to transport us and all stores from ship to shore and vice versa and because we were navy they expected us to provide the inter ship communications. In other words a UHF circuit manned by a comms rating, and for a few days that rating was me. It was almost like having my own private navy as there was no discipline to worry about just tell the ship when we were coming along side and with what and in what state especially that of some of the guys returning from a run ashore. Heaven had arrived. The weather in the main was absolutely foul with high winds and plenty of rain to contend with.

One of the officers a lowly Lieutenant who I think was attached to the Comms Department, had to carry out normal duties like that of officer of the watch. Now this particular chap had decided somewhere along the line to work on his eccentricities and this he accomplished very badly. He took to wearing a light weight cap normally kept for use in hot climates and he for some reason known only to himself started carrying around a telescope. The telescope he wore under his arm rather like a sergeant major's swagger stick. The commander of the ship had warned this young guy about both the cap and the telescope on a couple of occasions but he didn't take the hint and proceeded as before. During an afternoon watch in harbour the Commander decided to inspect the upper deck and found our chum still resplendent in tropical hat and sporting the telescope. He went berserk, he ripped the cap from the Lt's head and then with great skill carried out a Mexican hat dance all over it. The cap went from pristine white to a flattened black pizza in the minutes before it was deftly kicked over the side. The telescope was taken from him and then his horoscope was read in front of the gangway staff much to his dismay and the QM's amusement. He departed the ship shortly after this incident.

The missile firing all over and finished with, it was back off to Portland for the infamous workup and so many a fine week (six in all I believe) was spent trying to impress FOST and his annoyingly efficient staff. This we did but there was only one problem that caused a few feathers to be ruffled. This was after the night that another LRO and myself went ashore in Weymouth and after a reasonable evening in one of several hostelries we decided to walk back to the ship. Some might say that this was courageous others will undoubtedly say it was downright lunacy we on the other hand thought that it was a great idea and so off we trudged. At some point on the way as we walked along the docks we came

upon a small ship whose gangway staff exchanged pleasantries with us which ended up with me and my mate going onboard for a nightcap of schnapps. Now to anyone half sober this could have been an indicator as to what nationality the ship's crew were. It was only after spending about an hour on board and helping our new found chums to get through the best part of a bottle of the aforementioned firewater that we decided to take our leave. We were escorted over the side amidst a lot of noise and shouted farewells and off we went. The shore patrol didn't seem to share our enthusiasm for our bloody good run ashore and where we'd ended up. It was an EAST GERMAN registered freighter called Von Lenin or some other good communist name, that two of the navy's idiots who had access to seriously sensitive material had been getting smashed with the ENEMY. I had Class 1 clearance through the official secrets act so had a healthy knowledge of things super secret. We both got an unofficial bollocking behind closed doors I think, and nothing further was ever said !!!! Looking back on the whole incident we could have been taken prisoner and whisked off to somewhere pretty unpleasant in the Soviet Union and nobody would have known of our whereabouts except our captors. I shudder to think of the consequences now.

Having finished the workup we wended our way back to Portsmouth where we were to stay for a short period and so whilst alongside the wall the radio department went into harbour routine. This meant that the EW boys would again revert to being standard communications personnel. It was thus that I had charge of one of the watches and had at one time two RO2's to complete the compliment. One of these guys was to become a good mate over the time on board and he was "Simmo" (Simpson of course) and it was he and I who started playing cribbage firstly against each other and then later as a team. In fact when playing in the ship inter departmental competition as a pair we were invincible, nobody could beat us and one evening our opponents from a stokers mess, who were absolutely thrashed, would not believe that we weren't cheating. They refused to play us ever again and kept their word which was a pity because it's almost impossible to cheat at cribbage. What actually happened that made us so strong was that except when on duty during normal working hours we played crib every, almost every day. Our duties in the wireless office were to look after a shore telephone link, shore teleprinter and the crypto side of the business. This meant that we had hours when nothing but absolutely nothing would happen so we played crib against each other. At one stage we were playing a whole game of twice round the board just to score 15 as a tennis score. We got to the point where on the first laying of a card we had a reasonable idea of each other's hand.

When it came around that we were to have the morning watch – 0400 to 0800 we took it in turns to have a lie in until 0600 when it was time to clean up the wireless office ready for the next watch and the day crew to come in. One fateful night it was my turn for an extra couple of hours kip. I was woken up by Simmo and in my befuddled state was trying to get dressed when he appeared again in a state of panic. I shot up to the wireless office to find the Duty Security Officer, the Quarter master and boatswains mate standing in the middle of the room all glaring at me . I explained the position and this seemed to calm them down a bit but it wasn't me being in my bunk that was concerning them so much as that Simmo had left the wireless office door wide open when he came to shake me – this in the middle of yet another security scare from the IRA. We finished our watch and after having breakfast set off for a spot of leave, well 48 hours to be precise as was usual in these circumstances. On my return aboard I was immediately summoned to change into working rig and present myself to the Officer of the Watch who was waiting to put me on a charge. "For what" I asked and to which I didn't receive a reply from the Chief Yeoman who was fussing around like an old woman (more of which later). The long and the short of it was that I along with Simmo was

being charged with almost everything from breach of the Official Secrets act to sodomy as far as I could make out. Having been charged and then directed by the Master at Arms to say nothing I was remanded to the Commanders defaulters table. So it was another change of gear into No3's and then within the hour up before the Commander, one Cdr Mills.

I should say at this juncture that Cdr Mills position on the ship was that of the First Lieutenant on smaller ships but as we were deemed to be a large ship our main driver was a Captain, he then had Cdr Mills as his "Jimmy" who in turn had a senior Lieutenant Commander as his Mate of the Upper Deck (MUD). This category was new to all of us. So it was up before the Cdr that I went and asked by him to give a full account of the morning watch when Simmo had left the main BWO door open. As I started to give my version of accounts my Divisional Officer leapt forward brandishing great sheaves of paper which promptly dumped on the Cdr's table. Having done this he then started to defend himself and have a go at me. He had underestimated the Commander who in one deft stroke knocked all of Whiteheads files across the office flat and told him there and then not to interrupt his (the Commanders) proceedings. The Commander had started life in the navy as a junior telegraphist and worked his way through the ranks to his present position and was therefore totally aware of what went on during the morning watch in a wireless office. His comments to me were ever so chatty and he apologised saying that he was sorry but because of my seniority he had to pass the matter to the Captain. Doom descended as I was remanded to the Captains Table – this was it, I was going down the plughole.

So another change of uniform into No1's – I was getting good at this part of the drill – and I was then marched to the table by the MAA who seemed to now be in his element as the ships policeman. The MAA was an objectionable man who was as round as he was tall and his beady little eyes squeezed through to the outside of his fat face and he sweated a lot. His name was DRING. The number of people at the Captain's table was much reduced from that of the others so far. There was me, the MAA, my Divisional Officer and last but by no means the least was The Commander for some reason. The Captain asked the questions, listened to the answers then told Lt. Cdr. Whitehead to be quiet before Cdr Mills stepped forward and became my total defence saying that in harbour it was the usual practice for senior rates to have a lie in on the Basis that this was the way he had acted when he was a communicator. The Captain seemed pleased I got a reprimand which meant that the "sentence" was noted on my records for six months and then expunged. Simmo got 14 days stoppage of leave and wasn't happy. Still we managed to hone our cribbage skills even further.

It seemed the whole sorry episode was one that nobody really wanted to be involved in from the duty security officer up to the Captain. Later we found out that the duty security officer had only mentioned the episode in passing Whilst having a drink in the wardroom after dinner. He'd in fact made a bit of a joke about it. Unfortunately our Divisional Officer was there at that time and it was he who'd brought the charges against us and not anyone else. He'd apparently been trying to "show off" to the other heads of departments as to how good he thought he was. It was all to do with rank evidently. Lieutenant Commander Whitehead was the only head of department who wasn't a full Commander and this had been needling him for some time.

What actually annoyed me more than any other feature of the BWO was that Whitehead invited me to his cabin and tried to justify his actions to me whilst offering me a drink which I'm happy to say I declined. He got his just deserts later in the commission I'm pleased to say.

It was shortly after this incident that we sailed for a visit to Liverpool to join the celebrations commemorating the Battle of the Atlantic. We stopped off in Plymouth for some reason and it was there that I received the call from home that my mother was falling to pieces and my father had run away with another woman. I was sent off on compassionate leave ostensibly to help sort out the resulting mess or at least help if I could. There really wasn't anything that I could do as there was nothing that much different from what was normal in our household. The only thing that did happen was that I basically threw my grandfather and two uncles out of the house for their attitude in looking after our family which they said that they would do only if my father was then kept out of the house. We fell out big time and didn't really speak much after that but that was their loss, not mine. The only thing that I can remember about Liverpool was arriving there at 0530 on Limehouse Station and having to ask two of the biggest policemen in the world where the docks were. Oh yes! it was raining like hell at the time.

Far Flung Places

Finally the time came to leave and Liz and I said our farewells which for me was absolutely gut wrenching. I'd never experienced anything like this goodbye in all my life. I couldn't sit down on the train nor stand up, I just walked up and down the carriageway, I wanted to hit something. Thankfully there was no one else in the carriage with me so was able to cry all the way to Liverpool Street Station in private. Luckily I met some of the other guys at Waterloo and life was returned to normal with the tales of daring do and conquests flowing thick and fast none of which anyone believed but we all laughed anyway.

Came the night before we sailed to places far flung and I was holding down the First watch (2000- 2359) and signals were flowing thick and fast and covering every activity of the ship (Simmo and I didn't even have time for a game of crib) when I received a call to attend the duty commanding officer at the wardroom. Clipboard in hand and pencil at the ready I duly presented myself to MUD of all people who'd had a couple of drinks I suspected. "I want you to contact The British Embassy in Rome and ask for a new programme of events to be sent to us asap as you know that we are not now going to Athens after all". This was the first that I'd heard of the change of venue but so what. I advised MUD that we would try to send a signal via the Admiralty who would then transfer the signal to Malta for onwards to Rome. This to MUD was totally unacceptable or so he said and then instructed me to flash up our strongest transmitter and send the appropriate message. I reminded the duty commanding officer of the standing orders relating to the transmission of signals whilst alongside and especially when tied up to a fully laden ammunition barge, and no I couldn't possibly send such a signal. He then berated me for not being loyal to the captain and the ship. I on the other hand advised him that I felt that he was drunk and that I would not take an order from him and left.

"You've really blown it this time" I thought but give the man his due, he called me to his cabin the following day and apologised and asked that the matter be best forgotten. Phew!!!!!! 22 July 1965 was the big day – we finally cast off and made for the sea albeit two days later than we had told everybody. There were people on the jetty and also on the Round Tower at the entrance to Portsmouth harbour all waving us off. On reflection I now know

what the guys on the ships sailing for the Falklands must have felt as they waved goodbye. It was an odd sensation I must confess.

As soon as the buildings, roads and people on the shore became indistinct it was down to the business of sailing the ship. We stopped off at Gibraltar, Naples with all of the attendant tourist attractions including spending a day on the island of Capri but by this time we were in tropical rig. In other words we wore shorts and whites when going ashore. The big exception was Naples where we had to wear long trousers because some clot had heard that the Italians weren't keen on men wandering around wearing shorts. Needless to say this was the biggest load of old bull as everyone in Naples was suitably dressed in the stifling heat but us.

The navy always had an odd approach to the Roman Catholic religion in that if there was a church parade then the RC's were dispatched to a different part of the ship to carry out their own ceremony. Still don't understand the whole ethos but there you go.

The point I'm coming to is that one of my mates was as Irish as the day was long and one of the nicest guys I came across in the navy and he a few others of his faith had made the journey to Rome to have an audience with the big man himself – The Pope. It was after we'd been at sea for a couple of days that Paddy O'Rourke came up to me and told me about his visit to his Boss. I had to show interest of course as he was a mate. It was when he suddenly produced the biggest St. Christopher that the world had ever produced and thrust it into my hand that I was just a bit taken aback, especially as he was telling me that this had been blessed by the Pope himself. I tried to convince him that the other RC's would probably like this more as it had been blessed etc.. No matter what I said he wouldn't have it and I remember some of his words "I want you to have it so take it you bloody heathen" about sums it up. I took it he was happy, I was touched actually bearing in mind he knew my views on the religions of the world

I still have that same St. Christopher. One of the things that the EW world had tried to instil in to the navy was that whilst we could pick up signals namely radar emissions from other vessels that they could do the same to us. So it was that we were told , that not too far ahead was a Russian cruiser of the Sverdlov class and so the mighty weight of the operations people swung in to force. Switch off all none essential electronic equipment was the order from the bridge. Great I thought at last someone is listening to us and we will get one over on the terrible Ivan at long last. I went up to the bridge with the object of viewing the enemy at close quarters and to view the various radar and radio arrays that she may have only to find that the blasted ship was only about a mile away. Why oh why could our lot not grasp that if we could hear their radar etc from over 30 miles distance that the Russians could do the same to us. It was with total dismay that I expressed my views as we had put the Russian ship just about a mile behind us when it was authorised to switch every piece of equipment back on again. In retrospect I suppose they had tried and that at least it was a beginning upon which we could build.

We headed south and came to the island of Stromboli which is and was an active volcano which actually obliged us by blowing out of the main vent a perfect smoke ring as we sailed in a big circle around her. As I've said before this is not a re-creation of the trip to the far east but just memories and one such was entering the Suez Canal for the first time. What actually happened was that we parked the Big D in the roads at Port Said and waited for the rest of the convoy to congregate. As soon as we'd stopped out from the shore came the

bum boats as they were affectionately known all manned by the grubbiest Arabs that you could ever imagine, they brought with them wares of every kind but most of which was pure crap. What they would do was strike a bargain with you and then you lowered a bucket on a rope to them they would place the goods therein and then you would pay them by placing the money in the bucket and sending it down again. It usually worked except that these guys were all known as Jock and they became over excited whenever the bucket didn't go back down as quickly as they wanted. The names on all of the boats was also "Jock" something or other. Now it was at this point that the Gods smiled upon the whole crew of the Big D. MAA Dring came on to the upper deck and promptly started to push his way to the front of the milling throng and finally he held the rope that held the bucket that was to be lowered down to the last of the bum boats that was selling Turkish Delight. Dring even managed to out bid one of the crew for the last three boxes of this disgusting sweet.

He paid his money and with a nasty grin on his face took off back to his cabin with his goods, probably to run his piggy little eyes over his booty. It was with undisguised delight that some two days later and well down towards Aden that a demented scream was heard emanating from the MAA's cabin. He'd finally lost it we hoped but unfortunately no. The scream was caused by our fat little MAA who upon opening his second box of Turkish Delight found that he'd purchased a box of the finest sand that Egypt could offer. The third box was more of the same. Sometimes the gods are angry sometimes they are on your side – we'd won just a small victory that day,

The day for the MAA wasn't helped when someone from the communications department rang through to Dring's cabin on the internal phone and when it was answered all he said was "DRING DRING, DRING DRING" and immediately put the phone down.

The MAA went mental and a mighty investigation was carried out along the lines of that in the Caine Mutiny – no one cracked, no one gave the game away, no one confessed – everyone but everyone fell about laughing. I think that that incident sealed forever the lack of respect that anyone ever may have had for the Master at Arms. SUEZ – now that's a name that conjures up all of the magic of the mysterious east and it was here that we saw the terrain change from lush Mediterranean to the sands of the desert and the east. We sailed off passing some of the still sunken vessels left over from the Suez crisis, past the main dock area into the wild desert sands. I was to spend all day on the signal deck looking out for any form of communication mast or radar installation and then pass this info down to the EWO for them to track and analyse. One of the things I remember was that of seeing an Egyptian fast patrol boat moored in amongst some palm trees and on the top of the mast was a tracking radar of distinct Russian construction – BALL GUN was its name but unfortunately it wasn't switched on that day. The canal takes you by surprise as it is so long until you eventually reach the Bitter Lakes. What was strange was that as we headed south land to our left was highly cultivated and green and lush. The land to our right stretched away in to the distance and was unremittingly barren, bare, devoid of anything or so it seemed. The heat was horrendous but because it was so dry we didn't seem to feel its strength so much so that I spent the entire day on the upper deck plotting radar installations and didn't actually suffer any burns. I just went blackish by the next day. It was as we were nearing Ismailia that I saw my first camel and then having seen one of these odd looking beasts I then encountered herds of the blighters. Don't try swimming in the Bitter Lakes. Firstly it doesn't taste too good, secondly we're sure that it is highly contaminated with everything known to man and then some and finally it's hard to swim in. It's like the Dead Sea- neat salt. What does take you by surprise is that there are one or two lay byes on the canal and it's strange to see the super

structure of another ship over the tops of sand dunes heading the other way. It's best to remember that the northbound convoy of ships has priority and that was why we had to moor up in the Bitter Lakes to wait for them to pass through. We as a warship were at the head of the southbound convoy and soon cleared Port Suez and headed off in to the bluest water in the world the RED SEA making for the delights of the east. ADEN was always the takeover point for one ship when relieving another for the far east station and so it was that we moored up in the harbour to await the arrival of HMS London. It was hot and getting hotter by the hour as we moved in to the second day but luckily Devonshire was one of the new breed of warship and was fitted throughout with air conditioning. In other words it could be downright cold.

I'd been awakened the night before by one of the team saying there was a shore call for me. Naturally I thought that someone was taking the mickey and so turned over only to be prodded again to go to the BWO as there really was some calling me from shore side. It was my good old mate a one Taff Williams from Kranji Wireless who was now based in Aden. You may recall that Taff and I used to take Bukit Panjang bars by storm taking in great quantities of Tiger lager closely followed by Gin and Lemon of all drinks. Now Aden was situated right in the middle of the Muslim world and was therefore DRY, we on the other hand were not and so when young Taff looked at the crew list he saw my name and his problem was solved. The ships boat plied back and forth to the shore and duly arrived back alongside at 1200, which in the navy was always lunch time and more importantly TOT TIME. Williams arrived on board with a couriers bag containing some very low key signals and was then ushered down to our mess. It was great to see my old drinking buddy again and of course he was made welcome by one and all and he managed to at least imbibe 2 tots before lunch and a can or two after. By 1400 it was decided that perhaps Taff ought to return ashore and so we loaded up his courier bags with mail and escorted him back to the gangway. On reflection I think carry him was a much better description as his legs had ceased to function properly and both eyes were acting independently of each other. The last I saw of Taff was him lying across the thwarts with this silly grin all over his face. On schedule the LONDON arrived and those of us who were allowed on to the shore side of the ship just stood and gazed. We had never seen anything like it. Sailors will always tell you that you can spot a happy or miserable ship from afar. I know that this sounds preposterous but from experience I know this to be true. The ship will have an air about it that is totally indefinable but you will know. The LONDON was in every respects identical to our ship but as it coasted to its mooring station you could almost feel the gloom, it had an aura. It was an unhappy ship. We soon found out the reason Captain Bartosik was the main driver and to all intents and purposes he was as his name suggested namely an absolute bastard to his crew regardless of rank. We on the other hand had a ship that was renowned for being one of the happiest, maddest, most efficient ships in the navy at that time and by the time that we returned from our commission I understand that people were queuing to sign on or get a draft aboard. The changeover having been achieved we headed for the island of Socotra situated right on the Horn Of Africa, to drop off some students who'd hitched a ride with us only to be told to keep out of their waters. Still helicopters are a wonderful invention and so duty done we headed off out on towards the middle of the largest ocean that'd I would have crossed in a ship. The Indian Ocean was kind to us on that trip and was calmness personified except for the fact that the swell in that ocean is enormous and that became apparent when it was declared that we could go for a swim. We stopped mid ocean, dropped scrambling nets off the quarterdeck, set up a lookout with a rifle on both sides of the ship and then it was a free for all. We were just like kids it was wonderful for the half hour that we were let loose. Oh by the way the guys with rifles were on guard against the intrusion of any unwanted creatures, in

particular Nobby Clarks – SHARKS. One of the duties of HM warships throughout the world was to keep tabs on all merchant shipping and so it was that we challenged all and every ship that we came across asking them to identify themselves, tell where they were heading etc.. “What Ship where bound “ was the signal flashed out on an Aldis hand held or 10” lamp to which we nearly always received a reply sometimes it was clean other times not so. Mostly a bit of humour crept in to the exchange, but what they didn’t know was that at two points in the world we would hand in a report about our meeting and this was immediately passed on to Lloyds of London. The Russians were always the fastest and most efficient when replying whereas some of those ships serving under the flags of convenience were hopeless. Another oddity was that when a merchant ship passed a warship it would dip it’s ensign as a mark of respect and this was countered by us doing the same in return. All pretty friendly for the men of the sea. SINGAPORE.

We arrived in August 1965 almost to the day that Singapore declared Independence but I don’t suppose that we had much to do with this grand event. To be honest I don’t think anyone aboard took much notice and just carried on in the same old way. We were of course getting ready for a big royal visit to Japan and thankfully I managed to escape any involvement in any of the official activities and just enjoyed the whole bit about the visit. Some of us headed off to the Ginza and places around to sample yet again the fleshpots of another country. It was too expensive for the likes of we humble sailors so we stuck to the outlying parts of the town. Strange as it may seem we couldn’t get used to the idea that whenever we entered a café or bar everyone in there would get up and bow and wouldn’t sit down again until we bowed back. Now this felt really strange to say the least but in the end we would also get up when anyone entered. It was good for the digestion. The really memorable part of this visit was the night of the Typhoon. We were all called back aboard and advised that the ship was as is usual for the Royal Navy and that is heading for the open sea when a serious storm is due to descend upon us. The problem was that Tokyo harbour is one of the busiest in the world and all of the vessels in there all had the same quest. Get out fast. We therefore only made it in to Tokyo Bay which is huge and then dropped two hooks and settled down for the onslaught. The engines were of course still running as we needed to be able to defend ourselves if necessary. As the night came down most ships of all sizes had secured themselves when it was noticed on the radar repeater that when they went out to 25 miles there were over 300 vessels all taking shelter in this bay. It was a sight never to be seen again I would wager. The force of the wind at sea was awesome as there was nowhere to hide and we just took the full force of the 100 mph winds as they battered away at us. Apparently the engines made over 270 corrective movements during those windy times. The guys on anchor watch could only manage 20 minutes at a time laying behind canvass screens up on the forecastle. They came back in from their stint absolutely numb with cold. TYPHOON TRIX had struck fairly and squarely. The following morning the air was still, the sun was shining and by the time that we were ready to set off nearly all of the ships had disappeared from sight. The whole matter of this screaming wind seemed now quite bizarre but we were throughout our stay in the far east to have and enjoy the delights of FIVE more of these little beauties. During our time we were entered in too many naval exercises which always followed the same pattern – the blue force against the red force and the good guys always won the day. It meant that we worked hard and then played even harder when let off the leash.

SINKING SHIPS & BOATS

This heading can indicate that ships were sinking or on the other hand being made to sink and so there are one or two little tales of this type of adventure that comes to mind but in no particular order. Our whistle stop tour of Borneo had just finished with our ship loosing off a few rounds of the old 4.5 inch shells at targets on or near the island of TAWAU, and much to the amazement of all we actually hit what we were aiming at. This was good considering that we were at war with Indonesia and half of the island belonged to them so that any over shooting of the targets made a mess of things on their side of the border. We'd sailed early one morning with HMAS Derwent in company as we headed in to the SULU SEA for onward passage to the Phillipines when a distress signal was received advising that a ship was aground on a reef and being attacked by pirates.

Now this was more like it The Royal Navy to the rescue of poor seamen in distress. The sun was shining in a clear blue sky, the heat was rising as we cranked up the revs and began the surge over a mill pond like sea. The whole ship rang with the highly increased engine activity and shortly people were on the upper deck watching out. The Devonshire was a part gas turbine driven ship and these turbines were only engaged at speeds over thirty knots. The chief driver decided that now was that time and gave the order to the engine room staff to switch on the gases. You could almost feel the ship kick and come up on to the plane and off we went at 35knots plus. "Signal to Derwent we've turned on the gases, see you later" instructed the Captain and very soon the small frigate/destroyer was falling further and further behind.

The time scale to reaching the reef was an hour or so but before arriving it had been worked out by the Navigator that this was one of the reefs best marked on Admiralty Charts for that area and was almost impossible to hit. Insurance claims immediately came to mind and I don't think that we were far out in our estimation. There, stuck firmly on a reef was one of the oldest tramp steamers that we'd seen for years, so much so that it had a woodbine stack which was reminiscent of between the two world wars types of ship. The woodbine stack meant that its funnel was tall and thin and looked like a Woodbine Cigarette. We could see that there were various boats and canoes around the stricken vessel and they were all manned by people from the nearby coral islands who'd apparently paddled out to see if they could help. These were supposed to be the "PIRATES".

The SS CARINA was a Hong Kong registered ship crewed by nearly all Chinese sailors who spoke no English nor any other language than Chinese so communications were at a low ebb. Off went the helicopter crew with an engineer and the Doc to give whatever assistance they could. In very short order it was found that nobody was injured but that the ship could not be refloated as the bottom had been completely ripped out. This little tramp steamer was a general cargo vessel and so there could have been any types of goods being carried. As it was the well deck was full to breaking with live cattle, numbers not known but certainly 100 plus. It was decided that the cattle couldn't be rescued and the only safe way of dealing with them was heave ho and over the side with them, and that is exactly what happened. The local islanders thought that Christmas was coming again and again as they herded the beasts away from the ship and on to the waiting land. At least the poor animals weren't going to be left to die of thirst even though their fate was sealed. HMAS Derwent

arrived and we had to pass over the evacuation etc to the Aussies and we left them to their fate and pushed on to SUBIC BAY.

Another place, another time we had the unenviable task of stop and search and this meant every small sampan to ocean going junks or anything else that sailed the mighty oceans. To provide protection for us and to also enforce ourselves upon those who didn't much care for the RN there were fitted on superb mountings were 20 mm cannons manufactured by OERLIKON. To see these heavy calibre guns fitted to a ship the bristled with guided weapons was quite incongruous as they were a throwback to the days when you threw as much metal in to the air as possible to foil air attacks. The beauty of these beasts was that they could be easily traversed and fired by anyone including yours truly.

The guns had their own semicircular mounting which enabled the operator to move through an arc of just under 180 degrees and also depress them so that you could fire almost straight down the side of the ship in to the sea. The reason we were fitted with this armament was that they were to be used against insurgents from Indonesia who we were at war with at that time. I must say that they really were effective and on one particular occasion we'd stopped a seemingly law abiding sampan making its way quite sedately along when away went our boarding party who once having taken control of the vessel radioed back that there was quite a lot of armaments on board. The crew were lifted off and set adrift in their life boat, it was then that the Oerlikon opened up and using incendiary rounds every so often soon had the boat fully ablaze and sinking very quickly.

The Indonesian crew weren't happy at all – still they were the enemy and the armaments would undoubtedly been used against our troops on the ground in Borneo. Not all encounters were serious some were friendly some just run of the mill there was one however that was downright hilarious and the most bizarre meeting that I can remember. It was another one of those days at sea that were as near as dammit perfect. The sky was as clear as crystal, the sun just beat down on a sea that was as flat as a billiard table and with no other ships to be seen in any direction the place was ours for the taking. It was then that the captain decided that it would be a good idea to have a boarding party exercise and ordered the sea boat away with a fully armed to the teeth bunch of pirates on board. This again was one of the fortunate days because had the captain ordered that the landing party was to go then that was one of my extra duties to perform. Thankfully it had only happened once before and that was uncomfortable in the extreme because radio operators had to take with them a huge radio set that “weighed a ton”.

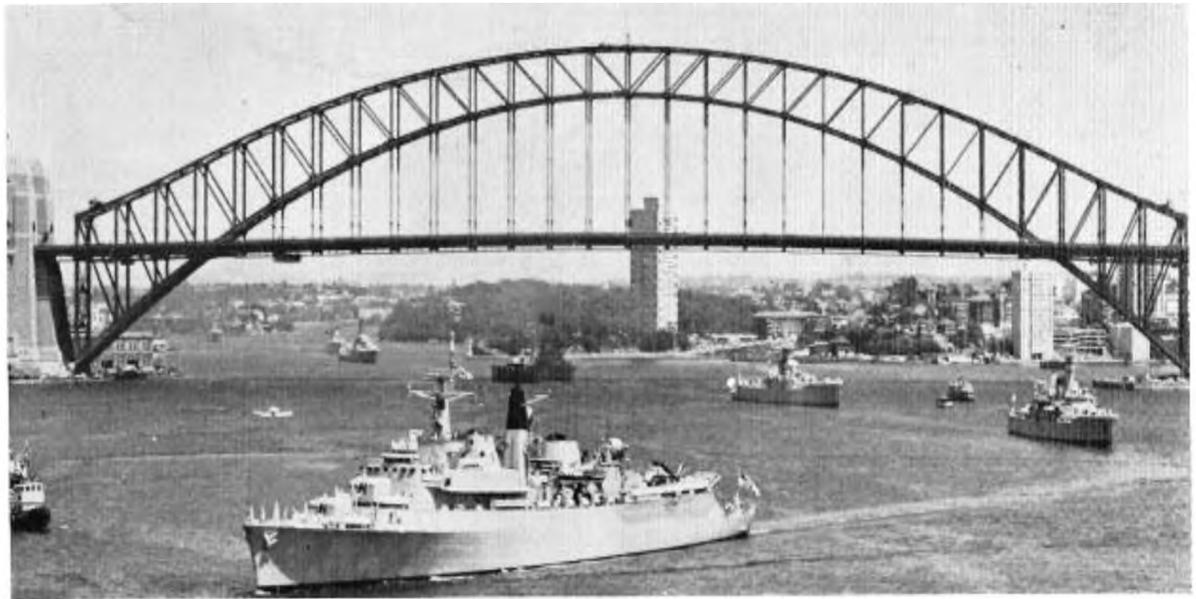
As well as the radio I had to be fully fitted out in combat gear as well as the idiotic tin hat, but worst of all I was armed with the famous Webley .38 pistol. If at any time our boat had capsized I wouldn't be here now recounting this tale. That was the trouble with the radio operators in the far east as a lot of them drowned because of the equipment that they carried. As the boarding party made ready and the ship's boat was swung out the ops room announced that they had a surface contact coming towards us very, very slowly. All heads turned to look in the direction given and we could just see on the horizon another tramp steamer making its way towards us at the exciting speed of 8 knots. We sped off and carried out a huge U turn came back on ourselves and dropped off the boarding party. The ship then retired to a safe distance and then hove-to to await the impending attack by our exercising boarding party. By the time that we'd finally dropped off the sea boat the tramp steamer was now quite visible and what a sight it was. There didn't seem to be an area of this ship that wasn't filthy dirty, rusty and salt encrusted. We ran up flag hoists to signal this ship that we were exercising only

and used the International Sea Code that at the time you could purchase from your local post office. Despite our efforts we could see that the crew was in a state of near hysteria with people running backwards and forwards along the upper deck, pointing at us and I'm sure that they were crossing themselves at the same time.

The tramp steamer hove to, they hoisted their ensign to show who they were, they were Greek, and they put the flag on upside down in their haste. It was at this point that we spotted the captain of this hideous vessel as he came out on to the bridge wing and was visibly wringing his hands together. This "captain" was like a character out of an old black and white movie. He was short, had an enormous stomach over which was stretched the grubbiest singlet that you could imagine. He jammed on his head the most dishevelled cap you could imagine, brushed his Zapata moustache with the back of his hand and then made a rush for his life boat. We tried more flag signals to no avail they abandoned ship there and then and rowed towards us to surrender. The captain (ours) was now running out of options until one of our crew was found to be Cypriot and so was hauled up to the bridge to begin a dialogue with our "captives". He tried to keep them from the side of the ship but the Greeks were too distraught to take any notice until it finally registered that we were only playing at military things. Things calmed down immediately for a short while before the expletives started to fly and they didn't need any translation what so ever.

The "captain" and his crew of vagabonds and cutthroats (well they looked like it) set off back to their ship, which by this time had drifted some way away, still screaming murderous things I'm sure. We on the other hand were absolutely helpless with laughter and the exercise was duly abandoned much to the relief of all.

OZ



This is a chapter or two in its own right and funnily enough doesn't cover the same territories before on my earlier visit to the land down under aboard the Caprice, this trip was a whole new can of worms. As one Aussie sailor remarked the Devonshire looked more like a mini cruise ship than it did a highly complex war machine. So it was that we sailed for OZ and took in another naval exercise on the way before it was decided that we were to now proceed with the official visits and shore trips that we looked forward to – showing the flag was the expression that all recognised.

At the head of a small group of warships was the mighty D02, us in other words as we sailed into Sydney harbour between the most impressive Heads as they are known. We sailed in towards the main part of Sydney – the Bridge – it was under this that we ventured and on to our berth at Woollamaloo Bay. No matter where we went it was the overpowering sight of the bridge and the opera house that dominated the skyline. As usual we were given the big friendly Aussie welcome wherever we ventured “Hello you Pommie bastards how are yer” was the common greeting. This meant that we were accepted. Some comedian had entered a ship's crew into a yacht race organised by one of the harbour boat clubs and for some obscure reason I ended up on board our boat entry. Now bear in mind that the locals had fair sized boats with all sorts of aids like 2 sails and crews who were quite happy to race whilst we on the other hand set sail in an open decked naval cutter, We had only one sail which was on a huge lateen mast rather like that of an Arab dhow whereby to alter course the long wooden boom was physically pushed around the upright mast as soon as the sail started to flap. Easy you might think until such time as the helmsman became a bit too enthusiastic and turned a bit on the sharp side. This would inevitably end up with your hand being crushed between the mast and the sail. It hurts like hell as you hang there unable to get your fingers out until the driver takes pity or hears that you'll castrate him if he doesn't let you down.

We didn't win but enjoyed a fabulous afternoon sailing around that grand harbour. The visit both official and enjoyable was soon over.



“ Pinchgut Island – was originally Fort Denison”

This small island near the Heads in Sydney harbour was built as a defensive island MELBOURNE was to be one of the milestones in our visit to the far east and it was here that the very serious business of EXPEDing started for the ships company. It was decided that there were some on board who would like to go about the business of back packing as it is now called by gap year students. So those interested were given the opportunity of taking off into the outback should they wish. Three of us decided that this was the life for us and so we just said that we were going to travel up to the Great Dividing Range and camp out for two or three days.

The officer in charge of the exped activity just said “yes off you go but please give a detailed report when you get back”. All of the kit was provided from the tent to a lot of the food that we might need including for some reason best known to the supply department, a large tin of baby carrots. None of us could work out the rationale behind it, perhaps that had one too many tins of carrots left over who knows???? The downside to all of this was that I was then given the title of Expedition Office Yeoman, now that's one hell of a title to be lumbered with at the best of times but just before we were to set off was in my estimation a bit below the belt. It also meant that I had to do the writing up of any exped carried out by the brave or foolhardy on board and to present this to the expedition officer.

A note on the exped officer – he was one of the best looking blokes that I've ever come across. He had all of his features in the right place, perfect hair and dazzling blue eyes in fact he should have been on every recruiting poster in the world.. As it was we think that he was given the big heave ho by their lordships as he left the ship before the end of its

commission and ended up in civvy street almost straight away. I met him a couple of years later in Regent Street and he was by that time into a public relations company. I hope he did well he was a nice guy who couldn't hack the military style of life.

The ship was moored in Port Phillip Melbourne and on the day that we set off for the outback the temperature was rising quite steadily as we caught the dockyard train for the outside world. The carriages on this train were all wooden and the seats were plane slats that passed on to your bum every jolt lurch crunch and bump that could be imagined. The oddest part of this train was the lighting – it was four lamp chandelier style that would have graced any Victorian home. Come to think of it they probably had been the style of the day when the train was first shipped out to Australia.

We tried the station terminal to be told that the next train to the interior was to leave in about an hour and a half so we'd best go off and take in the sights. Burke Street is big and noisy like any other city especially the rattle of the trams. As the sun was just reaching the yardarm it was decided that a drink was in order so we three Pomfrey the radio electrician, Wood the radio operator and myself found ourselves in the famous (or as some might say infamous) Chloe's Bar. We'd been ushered this way by several well meaning Aussies and it soon became clear as to the origin of the name of this establishment. There on the wall over the full length of the bar was the most magnificent oil painting of a very dark haired and nubile young lady by the name of – CHLOE. It was a sight to make the pulses race, the temperature rise and for young red blooded men to drink some more even if the measures were quite the silliest sized glasses.

We boarded what was to all intents and purposes a commuter train and watched the world go by and after quite some time we reached the outskirts of the city and suburbia. To us the gardens were enormous and the houses well spread out unlike the view when travelling by train in to London. Soon the city was gone and we were well and truly in the countryside and it was then that we had to change trains and ended up in a three carriage version of the London and Waterloo line train except that there were only four people left as we headed out in to the scrub desert landscape.

All of a sudden we stopped at what looked like a corrugated iron shed which had a hand painted sign on it announcing that we had arrived at a place called Wallawongaloomaroo or some other equally unspellable name. The driver then leaned out of his tiny cab and yelled out something to the effect that we'd arrived and was Brian ok. Brian was everything that a city gentleman should be he wore a dark suit and had a good looking brief case and he just yelled back something like "you're ok Charlie, I'll see yer temorrer" and with that he got out. There was no one in sight in any direction you cared to look. There was not a house, shed or any sign of human habitation other than a dirt road that stretched off through the red soil to nowhere. Brian waved and we set off totally speechless about the whole incident.

Healesville came in to sight and as we knew this was the end of the line and where we'd have to start some serious walking/hitchhiking if we were going to make our final destination of Marysville by nightfall. We trudged through this small town which could have been the film set for a Southern States of America small town during their civil war. We saw a thermometer on a wall that said the temperature was now 105 degrees and we were walking with back packs along a tarmac road. The flies soon found us and drove us to distraction. They went for your mouth, your eyes and even worse up your nose. Now these monsters

weren't the puny little creatures from home, these were about the size of bumble bees and there were lots of them and they knew that if we walked in line astern they could just go from one of us to the next. Drastic measures were now needed and so it was on with our anorak hoods and capes and we then spread out right across the highway. We managed to get the attack down to about 100 flies each by this tactic but it was quite a relief none the less.

The sun was beating down when we reached a huge reservoir which was apparently part of the freshwater used by the citizens of the big city. The countryside around was magnificent and would have graced the highlands of Scotland with its fir tree covered slopes which was where we found a huge water sluice down which hurled N gallons of water. To one side we'd seen a sign advising of the perils and the penalties of swimming in or paddling etc.. Not to be put off we sat down took off our boots and socks stuck our feet in to the cold water. Now that was paradise the sun was still beating down but the flies had taken off to any some other poor soul. We finally filled our water bottles and it was on with the boots and ready for the off that is until we saw that Woodie was still sat with his feet in the water. I tried to remind him that we'd better be off because of the distance still to cover. Woodie could only say in a high pitched wail " I can't move look at my hand " we looked and then looked closer and there no more than an inch from our mate's hand was the biggest spider I've ever seen in my life. It was a Brown Wood spider which can deal a nasty knock out bite. We'd both been that close as I'd sat almost alongside my chum earlier. "OK, on the count of three we'll grab you and pull you out " was the final decision. We managed to get to THR.. when , Woodie from a sitting position, jumped across the sluice some ten feet in width. Funny how the body will react under pressure.

Shortly after the hairy incident the only vehicle we'd seen in that hour came along, it was a huge lumber carrying truck now mercifully empty, and the driver slewed to a halt and yelled for us to climb aboard. He was going to Marysville which was his home town as well and was delighted that Pomms from the old country were going to stay there. The cab to his truck could only take one of us so we tossed a coin and the losers – me and Pomfrey ended up clinging on for dear dear life as our mad max driver threw his truck up and around the switchback roads that led up to the Great Dividing Range. We didn't mind the speed, the lack of crash barriers was unfortunate it was just that our new chum wanted to point out to us all of the points of interest and this he did by hanging out of his window yelling that we should look over there or under this. I'm not sure that we saw much more than a tenth of the scenery on that journey but night was falling and we had to find somewhere to stay.

This we pointed out to our happy friend. "No problem mate, I'll take ya to the best place in town" he said and within minutes he roared in to a camping and bar b q area complete with its own babbling brook. We fell off the truck expressed our gratitude to our new mate and set about the pitching of our tent – I say tent because we'd forgotten to bring the second one that would have made life a lot easier had we remembered. Still the upside was that we'd not get cold with three hulking great brutes sleeping in a two man tent!!!! Tent pitched we set about our meal and soon we had a small fire going over which we cooked some nondescript food. We were just letting the fire burn down ready for us to turn in – it was about 2030 and we were knackered – when there was the roar of an engine and much grinding of gears and out of the gloom appeared a Mini driven by none other than mad max.

He jumped out of the car kicked our miserable fire saying he didn't think much of it at which he reached in to his car, pulled out a huge axe and crashed off in to the undergrowth. There were yelps and groans and some of the most colourful swearing that we'd heard

bearing in mind that we were sailors and thought we'd heard it all. Within minutes he was back with a huge pile of logs in his arms which he then started feeding on to our miserable little blaze (his words), seconds later it was like Guy Fawkes all over again and he said he was a lumber man so there was no problem he knew what he was doing. He then dived back into his car and pulled out a case of beers which we then spent the rest of the evening disposing of. He went off we turned in and all was well with the world.

I have never woken up so cold in all my life. It was 0600 when we were all up pulling on every piece of clothing that we had with us. Thankfully there were still some embers of the fire and with a bit of blowing and praying we had a pretty good fire going. In fact we were nearly standing in it just to warm up whilst we waited for the billy to boil with the obligatory small branch of Eucalyptus hanging over the top of it. After initiation into the vagaries of the temperature we settled down to some serious walking around the area including a drive back to Healesville with our chum where he introduced us to all of his mates in the Grand Hotel. All in all we had a few good days away from duties and exercises and returned on board suitably refreshed before our next adventure.

Christmas was looming and our thoughts were turning to what would we be doing and of course to our families back at home but I managed to book some air time and make a call to Liz whilst we were still at sea and on our way to Freemantle. Many brownie points were gained that day I think. The only trouble was that everyone else in the wireless office could hear what you were saying so the conversations were a bit stilted.

Christmas Day arrived and fortunately I did not have a watch to contend with for the next few days so had been invited by my good mate Brian Higgins – our on board weatherman – to join him with a family that he knew for a big get together. The idea was that we would leave the ship at about 1300 and be picked up by someone from the family. The morning passed with usual high spirits being exercised and it was about 1130 when the first of the beers arrived. The Chiefs sent down a case of Tiger beer, then the Petty Officers did the same and this added to the amount that we already had was making for some pretty healthy imbibing. The crew was then on the move with one or other of us visiting different parts of the ship for a drink with mates from other departments and they with us so it was the issue of the tot that was the ball cracker and many aboard are not aware of what happened after that. Brian and I packed our hold alls and made it to the gangway (just) ready to meet our hosts. Waiting at the brow was the OOD resplendent in whites and sporting a sword, alongside him stood a pretty stunning looking girl who we later found out was his fiancée. We saluted the OOW, shook him by the hand and then kissed his girl friend. They were both staggered and speechless that the sight of us just leaping over the brow shouting Merry Christmas almost went unnoticed.

Waiting for us with a huge car were two pretty stunning girls and with envious looks from the sober people on board we were whisked off to join the family and had with them a superb day and night including spending the whole afternoon on the beach, the evening was a traditional Christmas Dinner with presents for us. We and the two girls hadn't slept all night and we ended up on the beach at 0630 swimming and body surfing for as long as we could. It was a Christmas Day that nobody on board the ship will forget in a hurry least of all the captain who if you read the commission book will see was entertaining the Russians and missed the dinner. So it was that we departed from Freemantle and apart from UK homecomings none of us had seen so many people on the dockside to wave us off. It was packed and there were a lot of tears shed that day even by some on board I would guess.

More exercising at sea, a visit to Singapore for docking and essential repairs before off on our travels yet again.

The Land of the Rising Sun

This visit to the empire of Japan was an entirely different circumstance – it was of course official but we were on our own with no Royals to worry about. We were to dock in and at the US base at YOKOSUKA so several people on board including yours truly decided on another big expedition. As there were to be so many of us we split in to two groups of six with one section going towards MOUNT FUJI and the other to the HAKONI IZU national park we were the latter of the two groups.

We'd radioed ahead to the US Naval authorities and asked if they could supply us with gear adequate for the conditions and bless them they supplied us with heavy duty coats, rucksacks and tents and all of this equipment they delivered to us on the day of arrival. All preparations had been made with food being supplied by the stores department. I'd taken from our lot a sum of money enough to pay for all rail fares, bus fares and any camping fees that might be necessary. In other words a kitty was in place before we left the ship. A big grey coach loaned by the USN turned up at the appropriate hour and all went well until we arrived at the main gate to the naval base when it was stop and search by a very officious US Marine who couldn't quite understand that we were in a different navy from his. In the end one of our lot stood up and in the best poshest accent that you can imagine advised the corporal of marines that we were all English and would he mind awfully getting on with whatever it was that he had to do as we wanted to get to our destinations sometime today.

The marine didn't quite know what to do so we all got off the bus and wandered out through the main gate in to Japan and we didn't even have a passport between us. This was the first time that we had come across the Japanese railway efficiency and so when levered into a rail coach by a man with a big baton we were just a bit taken aback. The problem was that we all had our rucksacks on our backs but were so jammed in with lots of little people that we were unable to move an eyebrow let alone remove our kit. I'm not tall but felt like a giant in that railway carriage. Looking at me from about belt buckle height was a little lady all dressed in black who kept talking to me and smiling a lot. The smiles were something to behold – all of her front teeth were silver and shaped like bullets it was like looking at a bandolier. The journey up in to the hills was quite uneventful and in the end there were very few passengers left – must be something about navy backpackers and the numbers travelling with them as witnessed in the trip down under.

We finally pulled in to the tiniest station in the world as it was only two small carriages long but what was even more startling was that everywhere was covered with pink orange blossom. It was only on closer inspection that it was shown to be fake and about two or three months too early, however it looked pretty in the evening light. We were now in to the awkward stage of our journey in that we weren't quite sure where we had ended up as our map was a tourist guide to the whole national park and this station didn't have a name. Just as we started to get a bit concerned at the fact that we didn't speak one word of Japanese and they weren't big on speaking English and directions were nonexistent a strange looking bloke

sidled up to us and then speaking out of the side of his mouth offered us a good hotel for the night. We declined and then asked him the way to a place called KOJIRI, he looked blank and then enquired again about the hotel. This one sided conversation continued for some minutes before we realised that our chum could only say "You want hotel". Not to be outdone we decided that all words seemed to end in I or O so with great aplomb we showed him our map and pointed to the place that we thought we were heading for it had a couple of tents marked in red on it. "CAMPO" I said loudly pointing at the map, he stopped, looked at me and then set off round the corner. Some minutes later there were three or four people all looking around a door at us and saying "CAMPO, yes?" I agreed at which they all fell about laughing and we had no idea why. One of our merry band had walked off and came dashing back to announce that there was a funicular railway with a train about to leave. That was enough for us so off we went. At the top of a small mountain we alighted and then managed to make someone understand where we wanted to go – take a bus they said in Japanese and we were ushered on to a very plush coach that had two girls almost like airline hostesses on board. We hadn't eaten since breakfast and it was now nightfall and beginning to snow which made taking a nip of Japanese whisky on an empty stomach just a bit on the risky side so we did just that and immediately felt a whole lot warmer.

Now one of our number was a very young welsh lad by the name of Dan Jenkins who couldn't have been more that 17 years of age and was about as unworldly wise as you could possibly be. Taff had been introduced to the delights of chewing gum and had been chomping away for some hours. "How do I get rid of this stuff" he asked, we said he should put it in the ashtray. At which our Celtic mate took the gum from his mouth using dry fingers, now everyone knows that this is the worst way of dealing with chewing gum, everyone that is except young Jenkins. Within seconds he had gum stuck to every finger on both hands, as he tried to rub it away the cat's cradle got bigger, he went redder in the face and we started to laugh. Newspaper was brought to bear and Taff grabbed a page or two and started to rub away on that. He now had a cat's cradle on his bare hands with larger and larger pieces of paper sticking to that. By now he was almost puce with embarrassment as the two girls had come to where we were to see what all of the commotion was and they started to laugh as much as we did. Order was finally restored as the gum started to dry and by the time we reached KOJIRI Taff was returning to normal.

Now KOJIRI turned out to be a long street with very few house on it and it had two street lamps sporting what must have been 60 watt bulbs at the most, so undaunted we set off through the village until we came to a large archway which led out to large open fields with some odd shaped mounds on it. We unrolled the tents and started looking for kindling wood (Remember it was still snowing) when there were suddenly a whole lot of people around us all in combat gear and sporting the latest in rifles and other killing apparatus. These were aimed at us.

"Wa you wan, why you ere" was the decipherable part of the interrogation by a chap in all the kit who had a couple of stripe/pips. We tried to explain that we were Royal Navy and that we were on a camping expedition and needed somewhere to pitch our tents for the night. Again CAMPO brought forth some sniggers but eventually we were escorted off what we later learned turned out to be a military infantry training area, and directed towards a cable car station for some reason. The cable car station was at the Lake Ashi end and we could have if we'd known have used this to get us from the orange blossom station to where we were now in a quarter of the time. Here we met a very accommodating chap who was the manager of the cable car station and could speak near perfect English who said that we could

pitch our tents under the building in the dry and relative warmth. Welcome news indeed to weary travellers but what was really needed was food so as soon as the tents were in place we went off to find somewhere to light a fire and cook our evening meal. Please note that we did not have a camping stove or any such equipment. Ray Mears would have been proud of us as we found some old boxes and managed to get a fire started albeit a very modest affair. I suppose we'd been trying to cook bacon rashers impaled on sticks for about ten minutes with not a lot of success when we spotted two guys coming out of the engine house carrying a bucket and very much heading our way. Now at this point to try to have spoiled the uncooked food of some very, very hungry sailors was inviting serious injury being inflicted and so we almost formed a covered wagon circle around our fire. The Japs smiled a lot and then threw the contents of the bucket on to our fire. It was some form of fuel and the resultant explosion and flames that must have shot twenty feet in the air, blew our food on sticks somewhere out of reach. They smiled and waved as they walked off, we were happy in that we could now get warm at last and that the snow was melting in our immediate circle. There was only one problem – we now were out of food as our meagre stocks had been incinerated. So we decided to turn in for the night, a sip of Sun Tory Whiskey was had by all, off boots and into our sleeping bags. A little while later Dan Jenkins voiced wailed out “Buster, there's a man out here with a gun and he wants us to go with him” “the snores from everyone grew a lot louder and even those who weren't asleep gave out mighty snores. “Go with him” someone yelled and believe it or not our valiant Celtic chum did just that.

This meant that as the team leader I had to get up to check out the situation and was just pulling on my boots when Taff returned full of joy and with a big smile announcing to all that we were invited up to the restaurant to have a meal with the manager and the night crew. Heaven had arrived when we saw that great feast of cold cuts laid out on a table for us. There waiting was the manager and the night chef who couldn't speak a word of English (nor we Japanese I might add) but had the most enormous smile. We tucked in to the meal with more than gusto but it was then that the manager committed almost the equivalent of Hari Kiri he opened an enormous upright cooler that was full to the top with BEER and said that we were to help ourselves. Stupid boy!!!!

We each enjoyed several bottles of Asahi Beer as did the night chef who was smiling even more than before. It was at this point that we introduced our new found mate to the joys of Sun Tory Whiskey and we toasted everything in sight right up until the point when he slid down the wall and disappeared under a long metal table. Time to go we thought and with much hand shaking, bowing and kind words we left after having assured the manager that we had to be away very early the next day as we were trying to walk around the lake in one go. He was happy and said as a question really that we would be away before 0900. Yep, not problem. I was the second one to be pulled from my tent at just after 0900 so departure times had already been shot to pieces. We all were feeling the worse for wear especially at the thought of no breakfast and suffering just slightly from the excesses of the night before. I think it was Buck Taylor who caused the greatest uproar that beautiful sunny morning when he was seen being thrown out of one of the loo's by some fairly indignant ladies. There he stood out in the open stripped to the waist with shaving soap all over his face clutching his towel and wash bag - to this day I don't know what the sign for “The Ladies” is in Japan. Unfortunately at the same time as this was going on our chum the manager hove in to sight giving a guided tour to what looked like a very prosperous group of people. The look on his face when he spotted us was a sight to behold and when we smiled and greeted him like a long lost brother he was almost overcome with grief at the total loss of face he was enduring. He tried to ignore us. No chance.

We left fairly sharply after that but not before we'd topped up our depleted stores with chocolate from a vending machine, and had a cup of some hot beverage. With fresh water in our bottles it was once more off in to the wild countryside. The sun was out, the sky was blue and by mid day we had all stripped down to the waist as the temperature had rocketed. What a difference a day makes as the song title says. The countryside was everything that we hoped for from wooded mountains and hills the road wound its way through small villages that were around the lake area. The people were ever so friendly once they found out that we were not after all Americans, some even tried speaking to us in French. We didn't speak French so there was a language barrier yet again. By the end of the day we'd arrived in the outskirts of HAKONE or to be more precise a small village like area outside this town, and again we'd arrived just as the sun had set so it was in darkness we found a superb place to pitch our two man tents. Having set up camp we decided that it was in to town for a meal, something to drink and just as important a wash at least in one of the rest rooms – we were getting a bit ripe by this time and that for sailors is an absolute no-no.

We found a bar/café that suited Buck and myself but the others wanted more of the high life and so went on in to the town, we stayed basically because we were knackered and couldn't walk another step. We sat chatting and having a drink whilst our legs were outstretched on the bench seats which meant that our feet were sticking out. The size of our feet became the subject of much amusement. As other customers came in they would stop at or be brought over to our table and then feet sizes were compared all accompanied with peals of laughter. It broke the ice .

The beer was served in quart bottles from which you then poured it in to coffee cup sized glasses, all very delicate really and not at all like the pint mugs of home. DOZO was the big word being used by one and all and once said everyone would then down their coffee cup sized glass of beer in one. As everyone in the place, including the ladies, had bottles of beer there was an awful lot of the old DOZO routine going on. Yet another party night was enjoyed and in some inexplicable way we all met up at the entrance to our field overlooking the town of Hakone even though we'd all enjoyed a different night out (ours was evidently the best as it turns out we had been in the red light district).

The last day of our back packing had arrived and as we sat around outside our tents leaning on little clumps of stone whilst sipping pink champagne and eating a tin of damsons between us we noticed a group of the locals milling around at the gateway. They were not looking at all friendly or happy and so we with all of the panache that another hangover would allow we packed up our kit and set off past the angry mob. How were we to know that we'd camped in the local CEMETERY, there wasn't a sign that we recognised anywhere. We made it in to town ahead of the mob and managed to find a café open for business but having checked out the amount of money left in the kitty it worked out that all that we could afford was four bowls of clear soup and this between six of us. Nevertheless six weary travellers were welcomed back on board late in the afternoon of that day and the cooks even found some food and hot drinks for us bless them It had been one hell of an adventure that we all vowed to do again if ever the chance arose.

It didn't unfortunately for three of them. Life returned to normal thereafter and we all got back to the normal duties of a fully operational warship which meant that the EW section was to spring in to action again. This time we were trying to pinpoint any radar emissions from mainland China and so armed with a coastline chart we set about the business of tuning in with the UA8/9. As the ship sailed closer to the coast of China we soon started to log and

record the long range radars shortly to be followed by us picking up both the airfield navigation radars and the individual fighter planes as they came out to investigate. The aircraft activity increased and became almost frenetic as we entered the Strait of Formosa they didn't like us being there one little bit.

We'd been at sea for probably no more than two days and I'd drawn the afternoon watch in the BWO and was quite happy just dealing with general communications for the afternoon. All was quiet and no great strain was upon anyone when there was a knock on the door which when opened revealed one of the bridge messengers who just confirmed to me that I was wanted on the bridge by the captain. Unfortunately CCY Dodsworth happened to be in his section of the COMCEN and heard the message. I say unfortunate because the CCY was one of the biggest crawlers I've ever had the misfortune to come across. He was always the first to dash to the captain's side if anything was wanted from the communications department which would have been meritorious had he not been just like Uriah Heap who wrung his hands together when confronted by authority. "OK Brown at the double get your ha, you're wanted on the bridge by the captain., let's look sharp." He then quizzed me as we went up the several decks to the bridge as to why was I wanted and what had I been up to this time. I honestly didn't know but didn't let on.

The bridge on the Devonshire was divided in that there was a lower area where the lookouts and signalmen were housed and then a flying bridge in the middle upon which the Captain, Officer of the Watch and Navigator would be. Dodsworth dived for the steps to the bridge and announced that he was there with me, he doffed his cap at the same time – ugh! It was gruesome. The best bit came almost immediately as the captain asked Dodsworth why he was there as he'd asked for me to attend him on the bridge and no one else and at that spotted me and asked me to go up the four steps to Olympus. There I was with our lord and master who with a big grin asked me to join him and would I like a cup of coffee. At this point Dodsworth was absolutely speechless and scuttled off muttering dire things.

The captain had only called me to the bridge to tell him and the others all about our camping and backpacking trip as word had gone around the ship about our tales of daring do. After an hour he just looked on with amazement and said that he wished that he'd been with us as we seemed to have had a fabulous time, instead of all the endless formal functions that he'd had to attend. It seemed that the other team visit to FUJI had been less dramatic than ours but nonetheless very enjoyable. I went back down to the wireless office and carried on where I'd left off much the great annoyance of Dodsworth because I wouldn't tell him what the captain had wanted to see me for. I think he found out later. Pity about Dodsworth really because all of his crawling was because he was going on to Dartmouth Naval College at the end of the commission to complete his conversion to that of a Sub Lieutenant (SD) Communications – and he was just crawling to impress anyone senior to himself - God help the navy.

There was only one saving grace about the whole of the Dodsworth era and that was the night that he'd gone off duty and left his cap in the COMCEN end of the BWO. Alongside his desk was an industrial sized paper shredder through which a lot of low grade but still confidential signals were shredded before disposal. At some point during the hours when Dodsworth left the office and to his subsequent return someone (and I know not who, he! he!) shoved the Chief's cap through the flashing blades of the shredder and it was only the thickness of the peak and cap badge that stopped the whole lot from disappearing as a heap of rags. To say that he went mental has to be the understatement of all time. Nobody

owned up, nobody had seen nor heard anything, including the shrieking blades as they tore through the material of a white peaked cap, tropical, Chief for the use of. The Caine Mutiny had none of the excitement nor vigour of the ensuing investigation. Still nobody died, nobody was physically hurt only the Chief's pride was a little on the bent side. To say that CCY Dodsworth was a laughing stock doesn't even come close, everyone on board thought it was the funniest thing they'd heard of for years. So it was!!!!

Ello ! Ello ! Ello ! a policeman's lot is not a happy one

The ship had made visits to Hong Kong on several occasions and we had all enjoyed the sightseeing and the nightlife, the joys of the Wanchai and looking out over the harbour from the Peak as well as making the perilous trip into and thankfully out of Kowloon City. There were other areas that we didn't go to as a matter of course and that's what this little chapter is about.

After a multinational naval exercise the ships from several navies including Australia, New Zealand, the US and France R and R was called for so it was in to Hong Kong harbour that everyone sailed. Now when there are that many nationalities with that number of ships full to the brim with highly competitive individuals gathered on one place after being at sea for some weeks it could be an explosive mix. To counter this there swung in to operation a multinational deterrent – the SHORE PATROL and for one night our ship had to provide some of the personnel. I for some reason drew the short straw and so at the appointed time of 2000 presented myself to the OOD along with two of the biggest gunners I'd seen on board as the Devonshire's posse. So it was off in the meat wagon with a CPO from the USN, a Patrolman RN, 1 Hong Kong policeman and us, that we went just touring up and down the roadways and it wasn't long before something was spotted.

The truck stopped the yank got along with the patrolman and up on to the rooftops they went only to return some five minutes later with a very red faced American sailor. The rooftops are cardboard shacks stacked on top of the roofs of any building that can be found. They are also the grubbiest flea infected brothels that you can imagine and were totally out of bounds. The yank was caught, his cap taken from him and he was delivered to the dockside for transportation to his ship. By taking his cap it meant that he would return to his ship out of rig and would therefore be in trouble. That was the USN way of doing things, we on the other hand would probably just chuck them out at the jetty and tell them to grow up. The Yanks were always hard on their men for what reason we didn't know. We'd driven up and down the main streets for a little while when all of a sudden our driver gabbled something in Chinese, the policeman said something to the Patrolman and with that the truck took off at great speed round a couple of roundabouts and back to a huge brightly lit intersection. There in the middle of the road were two sailors in whites, well white, grey and speckled with blood. As they had the same uniform as us it was the Devonshire Police Force to the fore. Me and my two trusty and large gunners for protection leapt from the back of the meat wagon to confront this hazard to the empire.

The spectre before us was a pair of Aussie sailors one had on top of a grade one haircut a perfect egg shaped bump from which had spurted quite a lot of blood. In fact the blood had gently poured itself over the top and down the sides like the lava from an active volcano. It was a work of art in its symmetry. "All I said to this bloody Chink was that I didn't want another pair of his bloody flip flops and would he bugger off and leave us alone. He then grabs a chunk of wood and smacks me over my bloody head." These were almost the

exact words of our Aussie chum that I can remember because at that point he looked at me with a forlorn look on his face and then gently passed out in a crumpled heap in front of us. His mate then chipped in “That’s the bloody truth of it Hookey, we weren’t doing nothing”. Hookey was the general name for a leading hand in all of the commonwealth navies and I was one at that time hence the address. I got my two strapping AB’s to pick up the crumpled heap and deposit him in the back of the truck along with his mate who by this time was absolutely distraught as he thought that we were going to press a charge against them both. The Patrolman asked me what we were to do and I said it was straight to the Aussie ship and leave it to me. We walked down the brow of the ship with me in front and my two AB’s manhandling the guy with the bump over their shoulders and as we arrived on deck we were met by the OOD.

Now this guy was a young Sub Lieutenant who, for an Aussie was a bit pompous and demanded to know what was going to happen. I managed to advise him that if our chum with the bump was seen immediately by the ship’s doctor then I would be able to turn this man over to them without any further procedure. Not that I’d ever been in a position like this before (or since I might add) and was making it up as I went along. I was however very worried by the condition of our mate and wanted to know that he was to be looked after properly. The ships medico was called from his bed and appeared on the upper deck looking none too pleased with life nor me if it came to that. “Just leave him there LH and I’ll see he’s alright” was the doctors suggestion but by now I was on a roll and said that if we could deliver him to the sick bay then I would not have to file a report to the Provost. With a sigh we were led down below still with the sailor draped over the shoulders of my AB. How many times he further knocked his head, arms and anything else that stuck out I dread to think but at least we’d seen him OK.

The young Subbie took me to one side and thanked me for the consideration to him and his crewman and so with a couple of salutes and huge grins it was back off in to town for the next leg of the shore patrol. I’d wondered why we needed a civilian policeman with us and was soon to find out as we hauled a couple of sailors out of the main Hong Kong police station and sent them on their way. There in front of the main desk and laying on the marble floor was a young Chinese woman dressed in the obligatory pyjama suit but with her wrists tied behind her back with wire. She was in a bad way and was throwing up, her hair was matted and her complexion was a waxy yellow colour. Jumping up and down and making one hell of a racket was a little “old” lady as she yelled at the desk sergeant and pointed at the girl on the floor. Being Navy we didn’t like this a whole lot (the ladies were still sacrosanct in those days) and quickly got the attention of the copper behind the desk and the only thing he would say was – DRUGS – and then carried on with whatever he was doing.

Wonder what happened to the kid on the floor. This was how the night went on and by the time that our team got back on board we were mentally drained and absolutely knackered. What a night that had been!!!! Seeing life in the raw when stone cold sober brings everything home to you, so me and my team went out for a couple of drinks the next night to commiserate.

Lion peak & beyond – the adventure Continues

The word went out from the Exped Office that yours truly and two others were off on their travels again and would any other keen backpackers care to join in. No was the deafening non take up of the magnanimous offer of adventure and so it was just the same three who'd taken off into the wilds of Australia who now waved goodbye. This time we'd decided that we were going to make the whole journey on foot without help or assistance and see how far towards the Chinese border we could get in the three days that we had to ourselves. I must say that we did get some odd looks as we walked on to one of the boats of the Star Ferry line duly resplendent in our hiking gear. We didn't mind we just paid our 20 cents and enjoyed the trip across the harbour. At \$14 to the pound 20 cents wasn't even worth carrying in your pocket.

Now Kowloon and in particular Kowloon City are vastly different from Victoria which is the capitol of Hong Kong and on the main island in that on one side of the water is prosperity and a future whilst on the other life is down to its bare bones. People go missing in KC and never to be found again. There is every form of vice that can be imagined from drugs to prostitution. Human trafficking to slavery of the Chinese kind, with gambling one of the biggest of the Chinese vices of all time. Whole families were bought and sold because one of their number had gambled away not only all of their wealth but also their whole family, who were then forced into slavery until the debt was repaid. The other problem was that the Triads weren't too big on Europeans wandering around in their manor and at best you could be killed in a place like KC. We went in and came out the other side almost by default, perhaps the god in charge of the Tongs was on our side for a change.

One abiding memory of the walk to Lion Peak was as we trudged passed the end of Kai Tak airport's one and only runway.



There, lying in the gutter was a cat that had been obviously run over – it's eyes were standing out an inch from its head – a gruesome sight but one that I've held since 1966. We scrambled and climbed up the hills surrounding the airport and harbour until at last we reached the top of Lion Peak where we sat and looked at the vista in both directions. To the south was all of HK harbour with its continuous flow of traffic from one end to the other. Nothing seemed to stop. To the north was the New Territories and onward in to mainland China, with range after range of hills. After this and feeling fairly good we found ourselves

sitting in a cemetery. The Japan trip all over again. We decided to move on pretty darned quickly as we didn't want a repeat of the Hakone incident.

We watched in awe at the sight of the big jet airliners coming in to land with their flight path just feet above some of the high rise blocks of flats, in fact on the tops of some of these blocks were massive black skid marks where the aircraft wheels had actually thumped down on them. We were mesmerised watching these planes passing below us and just above the buildings that we forgot the time and very soon it was evident that we weren't going to be anywhere near a place to camp for the night. We set off at a tidy old pace trying to get away from the top of the mountain as soon as we could but darkness beat us just as we came upon a tiny grass covered piece of land about the size of an average living room. Along one side of our bedroom was a stream that had emerged from a spring that could only have risen a few yards away. It was crystal clear and COLD but the strangest thing was that there were tiny lobster like creatures living in it, how many we drank in our tea I dread to think because this was the only water we had access to.

As the stream went through the middle of our accommodation we again couldn't pitch a tent so nil desperandum we lit our fire, rolled ourselves up in blankets and settled down for the night. What was odd about our expeditions was that it was only in Japan that we had the luxury of sleeping bags and so we tended to wake quite early as a result of being absolutely frozen. Lion Peak camp was no different the sun came up as we huddled around our fire thinking I'm sure that the ship was nearer than our planned destination. We set off early and were soon walking through what seemed to be mile after mile of paddy fields until we finally made it down to near sea level just as we came upon an old (seriously old) walled village. It was one of the most run down places I'd seen, the outside rendering had fallen off at least one wall to each building, the walls were filthy dirty and all it needed was a coat of paint. There again I suppose the people who lived there were dirt poor and paint was probably the last thing on their minds as you couldn't eat it. Odd thing about this part of the colony was the looks we received from everyone - I think murderous, suspicious and distrustful come pretty close.

As we'd effectively lost half a days walking, we decided to stop our exped at a place called Hebe Haven which had some nice little beaches and a small village from where we could buy further supplies. We pitched our tents and settled in before going off to explore the local area and it didn't even occur to us that anyone would touch any of our kit. Let's face it we still owned the place so who in their right mind would think of touching our belongings - no one did. Darkness had fallen and so it was off to the local flesh pots for us. Ten minutes later we'd seen the lot and were back where we'd started from. Each little café, bar and house was lit using gas lamps and so there was this eerie light everywhere you went and we felt that we'd be safer in our tents on the beach. Why we thought this way I'll never know but I suppose it was the castle mentality. The one abiding memory of Hebe Haven was the racket of ivory tiles banging down on tables - Yep they played Ma Jong in almost every smoke filled establishment for hours at a time.

We left HH the following day and decided that it was back to the ship for us, not that we'd not enjoyed our scramble through a part of HK & NT which no longer exists it was just the end of our available time away. We caught a bus this time but it still took an hour to get back on board.



Hong Kong has many memories of runs ashore, the magic of the east, the Wanchai district, the Peak all of which many many others have had exactly the same experiences.

A couple of things stand out way over the top of all of these observations. Whilst alongside we still had to keep a full watch keeping programme going in the wireless office

and we didn't just revert to using the local comcen for our signals in and out. One afternoon I was on watch in the wireless office with a couple operators when the internal phone rang. "Lt. Cdr. Whitehead here, as Duty Commanding Officer I've completed my rounds of the upper deck and note that the halyards on the signal deck and on the jack staff are flapping about I want you to go and tighten them all immediately". This in a slurred voice. Odd I thought, why phone me when the Quartermaster usually had the job of making sure that all was ship shape, so anyway I sent Simmo off to do the merry deed. About half an hour later the phone rang again with Whitehead doing his nut that the job that he ordered me to do still needed to be done. Simmo was back by this time and he told me he'd tightened every piece of rope he could lay his hands on, so I advised Whitehead. It was at this stage the he and I started to fall out again, he told me to leave the BWO, I told him it was against standing orders for the senior rate to leave the BWO for frivolous activities, he yelled something, I yelled back that it was the QM's job not mine and perhaps he'd like to evaluate the situation when he'd sobered up, he said something else and I hung up the phone. The other two looked on in amazement but to their credit didn't say a word. You are seriously in the crap this time I thought. Guess what – yet another apology was received.

The other event that stands out was that we had about four days to go before leaving HK forever so to speak and I eventually decided that it was time for me to have a suit made for me by a bespoke tailor. Not unusual you might think, except that for someone who'd only ever owned one suit in his life this decision was big time. I was going home to get married and so I thought for some obscure reason that a dress suit was the order of the day. Don't ask me why. So it was off to the Wanchai District of HK where most of the tailors had their shops and businesses. I was almost cheered off by the gangway mob when they heard what I was up to so it was with head held high that I checked out who was who in the suit department. I finally plumped for the Lucky Star tailors for no better reason than that I was getting fed up just looking at one shop after another. In I went to be greeted by the owner who bowed and bobbed about like a marionette as he looked through bottle bottom glasses at me. What sort of suit did I want, for what occasion, what material, what style, the questions were endless.

The only question that elicited an immediate answer was "You wanna beer an a cigare, please sit dow boy bring same pretty quick ". So I sat down in a plush armchair whilst they turned up the overhead fan and brought out a bottle of Anchor beer, a pack of Lucky Strike and an ashtray. We looked through books of swatches and having finally chosen my material I then had to go through the whole process of choosing a particular design. No sooner done than I was asked to stand and they measured every part of me at least twice with the head tailor calling out to his mate every measurement. All of that had taken an hour, two bottles of beer and innumerable cigarettes that were lit but never finished. I was told to come back the following day for the first fitting so I duly obliged – "You wanna beer an a cigare " was almost the first question and so the fitting was carried out with minor adjustments made and again was asked to come back the next day. Day three of the dinner suit arrived and so in I went to the Lucky Star tailoring emporium – " You wanna beer an a cigare " I was getting used to this but had only limited time available. Our man went out to the back of the shop and from behind some large curtains there was one hell of a shouting match started up with what I can only describe blows being struck. From behind the curtains shot a young lad with what turned out to be my suit, and he fled out through the front door and disappeared down the waterfront. Mr Lucky Star appeared shortly after looking as cool as a cucumber and as if nothing whatsoever had happened. "You wanna a beer an a cigare?" – I was on beer number three when a very harassed young bloke came in with my suit being carried ever so gently over his outstretched arms. Mr Lucky Star marched forward took the suit as if it were a

priceless piece of cloth and muttered something along the lines of “Bruddy iriot didn’ have suit plessed in time”.

The lad had been to the local laundry to have my suit steam pressed. I laughed he smiled and after the final look see to make sure all was well my suit was ready and I now had to pay. Bearing in mind the several beers, at least a pack of cigarettes, the tailors time, The materials, labour and not least the overheads the making of my suit had been achieved at the cost of - \$HK 140 (Ten Pounds) I don’t think the exercise could be repeated for that amount of money. Funnily enough we sailed the next day and just before we left we took on another Chinese laundry crew and of all people a pucker tailor who as it turned out could make a suit just as well as the man on the Wanchai and for the same price. Even though I bought another suit that was handmade on board it was less exciting and a lot less fun than that at the Lucky Star.

I’VE STILL GOT THE SUIT HANGING IN MY WARDROBE.

GOODBYE to the F.E.S

Now was the time that we would be saying our fair wells to the mighty Far East Station with HK behind us we were on our way via one week stopover in Singapore. What I would add at this point is that I’d decided on the day that we’d left England that as I was now engaged I needed to behave myself and try as hard as I could to save some money as I’d be getting married soon after my return. I actually managed to achieve this much to the annoyance of some of my mates who were always trying to borrow money from me as I was the only one that had actual cash in his locker. Those were worrying times especially when I had at one time 1000 Malay Dollars to hand until we made port whereupon I could bank them. I loved my mates dearly (not a thing that sailors admit openly I would add in the strongest terms) but temptation is a mighty thing to overcome easily. It had soon become apparent to a lot of people on board that I wasn’t going ashore all that often, perhaps once per fortnight was about my limit unless it was on one of our mad expeditions or when I was playing hockey for the ship’s team.

I remember one time when I was carrying out duties as Third Officer of the Watch that the subject was mentioned by the OOW in a nice friendly way. They didn’t want unhappy sailors it wasn’t efficient – not that it was put that way they were just concerned that I wasn’t going to get depressed. I managed this self imposed regime throughout the whole of this commission by sheer bloody mindedness and thoughts of Liz. I tried to write to Liz everyday even when we were at sea, on exercise or just alongside the wall and the only times that I missed out on this was when off on walkabout where letter writing could have been just a bit awkward . I felt it only fair and the right thing to do and I loved writing to her. Liz wrote just as often I think and had also managed to have sent out to me the weekly airmail version of the Daily Telegraph. What she didn’t know was that I had one hell of a fight to firstly get the damned rag but also to hang on to it long enough to read it and try my hand at the crossword. Everyone wanted it from those in the mess, via the PO’s mess up to the wardroom. One thing that Liz did send to me was one of the great hits of the commission and that was a Christmas Cake in time for Christmas 1965. This luxury arrived on board almost by special delivery by helicopter, wrapped in a box that you could have moored the ship to.

In fact we had to take heavy hammer to it and basically smash it open to reveal the goodies waiting inside. Apparently my dear old father in law had made this indestructible container in his usual manner of constructing anything wooden.

As I said earlier I'd imposed on myself the restriction on going ashore to sample all of the delights of the Orient but please remember I'd been to the FES before so it wasn't quite so hard as it sounds. This meant that every so often when I did go ashore and managed to get absolutely slaughtered, hammered etc nobody really took too much notice and I think that I got away with murder sometimes.

Fortunately for the forthcoming nuptials I received confirmation from the Hermitage hotel in Babbacombe of our honeymoon booking and also from a car hire company that two huge vehicles - Austin Princesses - had also been booked out for the wedding day. So duty done and paid for I could now relax and enjoy the ride. This meant that I managed a bachelor party in three ports that we sailed in to before getting home. It was almost a relief to be at sea sometimes just for a detox.

1966 and all that

Sorry about the pun on the well known book of 1066 and all that, it just seemed a good title for a chapter.

Now 1966 as a year was memorable for two specific world changing events. Firstly England against all the odds won the football world cup and we arrived back from our world tour just in time to see this magnificent feat on television in black and white. Secondly I got married to the love of my life - little Liz. I say little because I could at that time pick her up and carry her under my arm with my hand actually resting on my hip bone. She was to use the modern expression drop dead gorgeous.

We'd arrived back late in the afternoon so dropped the hook out in the roads to await the arrival of that happy bunch of brothers namely the customs and excise crew. These people always made a big thing about trapping any warship coming back from a foreign tour to trap poor Jack and take as much money as they could from each ship. Why they picked on the RN I'm yet to be convinced because the majority of sailors didn't earn a lot of money and therefore didn't buy a lot that was of great value. Nevertheless the fun bunch wanted their pound of flesh so, on they came. We all handed over our completed declarations and then had to present ourselves for interrogation. I didn't pay any duty even though I waited in line for ages for my turn at explanation. I must admit that some of dutiable goods were thrown out of the scuttles (portholes) by those who for some reason just didn't want to pay any tax, odd really.

So came the day of the official arrival and everyone was eager to get in alongside so manning the side was for once not an ordeal. I must admit that it is quite an experience to come back to your home port after a lengthy deployment abroad and to see so many people on the round tower and along the jetty was big on the lump in the throat scenario. Down went the gangways, on came the wives, girlfriends, family members there were lots of laughs and smiles and gallons of tears everywhere. Liz hadn't arrived by the time that everyone was changed in to civvies and ready to launch off for their leave.

There I was walking about the upper deck looking for all the world that I'd lost a pound and found a sixpence when all of a sudden one of the gangway staff called out that there was a gorgeous bit of stuff all dressed in pink coming our way. There she was, late, hers was the only train in the whole of southern England that didn't make Portsmouth on time that day. Who cared? not me, it was over the brow in one and so for the first time in my life a reunion was made.

The next days were an absolute whirl what with seeing family and friends for the first time in over a year, helping in whatever way I could with the wedding preparations and generally enjoying myself. Of course I'd neglected the small point that I'd need to obtain a mourning suit as requested (nay demanded by the War Dept) so it was that one evening Chris Browning, Tony Phillips, Colin Crick and myself set off into the East End of London would you believe to hire our suits. Everybody came away suitably geared up for the occasion except me, which meant that I had to phone through a few days later to enquire. The situation was saved and a suit for hire was duly available 3 days before the wedding.

Unlike modern times we then did have our bachelor nights the day before sentence and the timing of mine was no different. Apart from being thrown over a hedge into a ditch full of stinging nettles and jumping around in the fountain full of water outside the police station in Cheshunt – I really cannot recall a lot of what went on that evening.

The wedding went off as most weddings do without a hitch. The ladies loved it, the chaps just had another drink. I couldn't face anything whatsoever and had just two very large whisky's. The honeymoon went in a whirl of time all of which was to be cut very short because we could only manage an eight day stay because the Mighty D was to sail again 10 days after the 13th August 1966 for a nice little Baltic Cruise.



“The Day of Destiny”

Apparently this trip of ours in to the Baltic and especially to Leningrad was a very big political deal and one of international importance, so much so that we had several lectures by odd bodies from the Foreign Office and other, shall we say, clandestine organisations. We were told of the culture, how to conduct ourselves and in particular don't get drunk it was frowned upon by the Russians apparently – were they kidding or not we wondered.

So armed with all of this information we got down to the business of getting a pretty smart looking piece of kit up to Poland and Russia just to show them what a real navy was all about.

This gung ho attitude lasted until about 0600 on our second day out, I was on duty in the EWO getting all ready for intercepting anything Russian, Polish or East German, when there was a hefty change of course which everyone on board must have felt followed very shortly by a sizable banging, crashing and screeching of metal against metal. Yep! We'd smacked into the side of another vessel. The very bad part about it was that we were in thick fog, travelling at over 15 knots and nobody had seen these ships on our radars. It was only by the timely arrival and intervention of the captain who'd evidently sensed that something was wrong and dashed to the bridge ordered hard to starboard, that we hadn't struck the other vessel head on. The OOW was an idiot who I believe left the service not long after our return.

When order was restored we viewed the damage – one port side boat demolished. The davits holding the sea boat were sheered off and had to be welded back but was non functional. Several feet of guard rail sheered off and lots of paint gone. The Buffer and his crew did a brilliant job of repair with paint and canvass the patch up job was priceless' Couldn't let Ivan see us with our trousers down now could we????

Gdynia will go down in the annals of one of the most dismal, grey and lacklustre place that I'd visited in all my time in the navy so far. We were moored alongside in what must have been the military end of the shipyards and very shortly after our arrival we had the dubious privilege of our own guards on the jetty. These guards wore jackboots and more importantly carried machine pistols they also didn't smile a lot. Perhaps being drafted to Gdynia did that to a chap.

Needless to say we were all detailed off to take part in any activity that came our way from sports to official visits. I know that Poland at that time were not all that big on hockey so I and half a dozen others were then left with the dubious pleasure of being a guest of the Polish Navy.

We were duly picked up by a Lieutenant who was accompanied by a civilian interpreter who we asked the question "why did our guards have to carry machine guns was it to protect us or to stop anyone trying to escape from Poland?" "Don't worry about them they're just communists" our man from the ministry said with a broad grin on his face. We liked this guy immediately.

Not so strangely we were whisked straight out of the port through the grim little town of Sopot which was made up of block after block of apartments, Grim looking apartments at that and on to Gdansk. Now this was better we thought as we toured the old port and the palace which was a building at the end of a mews and would not have been out of place in any good neighbourhood in London. By this time we had been joined by three other Polish naval personnel who all boarded our coach totally laden down with cameras, lenses and about as much photographic paraphernalia as one person could carry. They said they didn't speak any English !!!!

The highlight of this trip came last as we were taken to a Cistercian Monastery . Imagine that, 10 hairy sailors being whisked off to a place of worship willingly some might say there again we had no choice this time. As we walked in we were to use modern parlance

“Gob smacked”, it was one of the most extraordinary places that I’ve been in. The whole of the wall behind the altar was covered from floor to ceiling with organ pipes, hundreds of the blighters of all shapes and sizes adorned this wall. Apparently a monk of their order had been detailed off sometime in the mid 1800’s to explore the whole of Europe to find out everything that he could about the shape, design, manufacture and of course how to play church organs. This he did and returned to this monastery some twenty years later and supervised the construction of this mighty organ. It was so ornate that there were even cherubs that rotated out from the tops as the instrument was being played.

Half way along the church seating was a repeater unit to allow all in the congregation to get the full impact of the music being played. We then had a recital – Bach’s Fugue and Toccata was on the menu that day – and it was the most mind blowing experience that we sailors had ever had.

We were almost numbed into silence as we made to leave but this soon changed as we walked out through the massive wooden doors in one’s and two’s. There on the steps by the coach were our hosts armed with their cameras, all now sporting enormous lenses fitted, cranking off shot after shot of us. When this was mentioned they would only say that they were interested in the architecture of the building. Yeah right. We were of course now on the records of the Polish Naval Intelligence and probably the KGB who were no doubt their masters.

We only stayed a day or two in Poland and soon we were on our way to the mighty seat of Russian imperial power (former I should say) – Leningrad .

As I’ve mentioned earlier I’m only jotting down the events that I found were out of the ordinary and that this was not just to be a travelogue of the Royal Navy.

We found ourselves stopped in the roads around the island of Kronstad near the mouth of the Neva River and there we had to stay until it was dark before our pilot came aboard to navigate us in to the middle of Leningrad. For some reason the Russian authorities had got it into their heads that we may be engaged in some sort of illegal activity like spying, or looking at their radar installations. Why else were several extra (S) people drafted aboard all sporting different branch badges like that of the stokers or electrical branches.

It was the next morning that was the really odd and bizarre part of this visit. Like a lot of the guys I was up before daybreak just to have a good look at the city from where we were berthed. Right smack in the middle of the Neva River and dead opposite the main street – Nevsky Prospect – was where they had parked us and our only means of transport to the shore was an odd looking lighter provided by the local authorities.

The sky began to lighten and we could then begin to distinguish the main features but there was one that bemused everybody who was up on the bridge. The large black feature along the road directly opposite us. The sun eventually came up and it was then that we saw the most peculiar sight. The big black blob turned out to be people who just stood and stared at us. They didn’t move, they didn’t talk amongst themselves, they just stood stock still. We waved – nothing happened, not a flicker.

It was shortly after this that we saw some movement on the top of a building, some 200/300 yards away and we couldn’t quite work out what these people were trying to

achieve. Even through binoculars we couldn't decide what the object on a tripod was except that it was aimed at us.

All of a sudden all was revealed, a signal lamp began flashing a message to us which we saw immediately that they were using the International 3 letter code. Having checked it out with the captain that we could respond it then became fun looking up and using the I Code as not many of us had even seen the code book let alone us it in anger.

The questions were of course very innocent to begin with like what's your name, where are you from etc. Then in came the sneaky little questions as to how many men on board and how many officers and ranks did we carry. We came up with the first ridiculous set of numbers that came into our heads all of which would have staffed our largest aircraft carrier. The questions were repeated and the same answers were sent back. There was great activity as they packed up their gear and slunk away with shoulders drooping – another small victory in the cold war had been won.

During our induction chats by the naval attaché it was made abundantly clear to us that we shouldn't fraternise with the locals unless it was on an official visit as it wouldn't be us who would be in trouble it would be the Russians. Apparently if we'd gone to any of the local houses or flats the residents would have been hauled in by the KGB or worse for a mind blowing interrogation at the very least.

We nearly always changed our currency on board and this time was no different except that we had to log exactly how much we had changed into Roubles the object of the exercise was that we were forbidden to bring back on board more than we'd left with. Not sure why but on the other hand there wasn't a lot to spend your money on, in fact it was the other way round with the Russians wanting to buy from us. Buy they did – like anything from Biro's, socks and shoes, shirts and cigarettes – there was this insatiable appetite for anything western. One of the stokers did just that and came back on board wearing just his hat, raincoat, trousers and shoes, everything else had been sold including his socks. He was in the pooh big time.

Another big no-no was to get drunk as the Russians didn't like this at all because there was no such thing as alcoholism anywhere in their country!!!!!! Well that's what they kept on telling the outside world along with the stories about no prostitution. Now there's another myth.

What happened to the locals if caught drunk was that whilst they languished in a cell in people's state police station 1234 they would be photographed in all their glory. The resultant photograph would then be blown up and stuck on huge advertising hoardings around town with signs saying "Do not give this man another drink" or words to that effect.

If you didn't go in to a café there was nowhere else to buy a drink except from what looked like newspaper stands dotted around the streets. The way to get a drink was to sidle up to one of these kiosks speak out of the side of your mouth like a second rate gangster and growl VODKA. The result was that you proffered money and out would come a hand with a tiny glass filled with what you hoped was real and not aviation fuel. The effect of the first jolt of this brew was to confirm that it was indeed avgas, however two later and you became numb from the knees upwards but very happy.

and were made of reindeer fur with a bright yellow and red felt design on the top. All very cheesy and touristy but it did the trick.

We then set off for merry England on the last stage of our journey before new drafts were issued and it was about the time that we sailed past the northern end of Poland or East Germany that we picked up our fishermen chums again. Well let's put it this way the spy trawlers, which were covered in aerials and not a piece of fishing equipment in sight, accompanied us from that point on but thankfully our lot had taken on board that we should keep all electronic emissions to a minimum firstly to put off the trawlers but secondly so that we would have a better chance of picking up any of their material.

As we came in towards the Kiel Canal our Soviet chums peeled off and we all exchanged waves and smiles, all rather silly really. All cat and mouse stuff really on reflection that they knew that we knew that they knew and so on. It was quite funny that when we arrived near to the entrance to the Kiel canal our latest follower surged alongside at about two cables distance and both ships crews that were on the upper decks both waved to each other. The cold war was an odd companion!

So back in to Portsmouth naval base only to be met by, yep you've guessed it, customs and excise so with a weary heart we all sat down and filled in our declarations. These handed in we awaited our turn in a long snake of a queue to be interrogated prior to getting our pink form of release. Easy you might think until it came to the turn of yours truly. I found myself standing (we weren't allowed the privilege or dignity of sitting down) like a naughty school boy, in front of a desk behind which sat what was obviously someone new to the job of ripping off sailors.

He immediately spotted that on my declaration that I'd described quite accurately that the slippers were reindeer fur with red and yellow trim size 3. At this point our spotty friend produced a large book of instructions, turned some pages, sniffed a bit then looked up and announced that as I was importing fur goods the duty would be £6. It took a moment or so to sink in and then the full horror hit me as I'd only spent £1 10/- on the little beauties in the first place. I then suggested to our chum that he reconsider as I was not about to give him £6 and I was not importing furs they were a pair of slippers. The conversation became heated and ended up with me going back to my mess to produce the slippers to scrooge. By this time the queue had not moved on and Jack in time honoured fashion expressed several views on the subject to the spotty creature behind the desk. After examination of the slippers he still insisted that I pay £6 and I was just as adamant that I wouldn't part with a penny. Now this had been going on for about a quarter of an hour when a more senior looking customs bloke turned up, he had two gold rings on his sleeves and a lot of dandruff, wanting to know what the fuss was all about. I explained my side of the argument, spotty produced his big book and started to quote chapter and verse to his superior at which point he was marched out into an adjoining room where we think the air must have turned blue. Seconds later a very red faced spotty young man sat down and confirmed that the duty would be 6/- after all. I paid, he issued the pink slip and honour was satisfied albeit with a long queue having been held up for at least 15 minutes.

The draft chits arrived and to my total astonishment found that I was being sent back to Admiralty wireless Whitehall. What a dream ticket for a newly married man.

It was now time to take my leave of the Mighty D and move on to a different stage of my life and career so like all sailors the farewell was “See you around sometime”. There never were any long goodbyes in the navy, it was off and away and thinking about your next draft. Pity really because the Devonshire was the only seagoing ship that I’d actually managed to spend a whole commission on despite the engine failures, untimely deaths of three of the crew, bouncing off another ship whilst it was securely parked. I can say that my time on the Devonshire was the happiest, silliest in part, the most hard working draft that I’d ever experienced with some of the best crew mates that you could ever want. So just for once I did feel saddened by the move.

One other thing happened whilst I was away and that was my parents getting a divorce. Needless to say I hadn’t been told that this was in the offing but the result didn’t surprise me that much bearing in mind the years of fighting, bickering, no money and downright unhappiness in the house that was never decorated unless I did it and a lot of the time not cleaned unless I started to attack it. My home life is worthy of another book on its own so I’ll not dwell on the subject except to say that 1965 was the last time I was ever to see my father who I’m told is now dead.

I had to have my marriage banns read and the ship being my only parish I felt that having them read on the Mighty D was pretty darned cool if the truth be known. The downside was that I had to attend a church service whenever this could be fitted in with the ships duties, my duties and whether there was a church service at all and so the whole thing took about six weeks. The other problem was that at times there were only about a dozen people in the mini chapel so the singing was just a bit on the lousy side and off key at best. Still there aren’t many who can say that they had their marriage Banns read at sea in a warship.

Whitehall, Me & Civvy St.

As from before I managed to obtain the requisite pass to live ashore working on the 15 mile radius plan. This was where my mother and sister still lived whilst I’d taken up residence with Liz and her folks who lived closer to 20 miles out. We didn’t actually live with the in laws but rented from them the upstairs of their house which they had converted into a self contained unit with separate entrance. This “flat” had three double bedrooms on two floors, dining room, lounge, bathroom, kitchen, loo, men’s dressing room. We also had the run of a large garden and a separate garage all for the princely sum of £1 per day.

So after a bit of leave it was off to meet the new boss who turned out to be a one Sub Lt Peter Fyler (SD)(C) who’d not so many years before come up through the ranks and was now OOW. He saw that I was a (W) rating but asked anyway whether or not I knew anything about Cipher machines like RAX etc. The only thing I could say was yes a reasonable amount which seemed to be load off his mind. He then took me to the main cipher room – I have never seen so many dials, switches, things that hum, whirr and get very hot in all my life. They were enormous great cabinets full of electronic things that I didn’t even pretend to want to understand.

I then found myself thrown in the deep end as apart from a 48 hour turnover I was to be in charge of all of the on line cipher machines from that moment on. If anything were to go wrong I was expected to fix it there and then. Better said than done, as on the next watch

the Mauritius connection went up the spout through a brand new online system and I'd only had a rudimentary 15 minutes instruction on how to use the blasted machine.

Two hours later we were still out of touch when the RS in Mau came through on a clear line and asked if I knew what I was doing. Well I wasn't about to admit that there were one or two holes in my knowledge, so I told him that of course I did and that it must be finger trouble at his end. It turned out that there was a button that I needed to hit after all of the rescue routine and having done so order was restored. The COMCEN cheered, I was an overnight hero (well I thought I was), the day had been saved and the right order of things re-established. There's nothing like learning on the job because you don't forget it in a hurry.

I certainly kept fit on this particular job because the cipher room that I worked in was at one end of the COMCEN and the RAX room was a storey up which meant that at regulated times I had a job of work to do so it was up and down many times during a watch. It was a great job really as there was only one person per watch who was trained (self trained would best describe it) to deal with the machinery and so you were left to your own devices most of the time.

Home life was great because I travelled to and from work by train and my trusty scooter which I left at my mother's house each time. Soon I felt that it was time that I learned to drive so I signed on with my best man's dad who ran his own little driving school. He was good and I managed to pass after only 6 lessons with him and lots of hours with mates who let me drive them everywhere. This again was good experience as the vehicles were a minivan, a VW Beetle and an Austin 1100. You cannot get more diversified than that.

Shortly after getting my Pink slip saying that I was now licensed to take to the highway came the moment of truth – let's by a car. Hm !!!!! Hadn't done this sort of thing before and therefore co opted one of my pals to help me select a suitable machine. Within days of the tyre kicking looking under bonnets and much sucking of teeth a selection of steed was finally made. For the outlay of the princely sum of £80 yes £80 I became the proud owner of a Ford Thames 5cwt van in a fetching pale washed out or faded blue, registration number 394 TMC. This van had only three forward and one reverse gear. The windscreen wipers were governed by a compression unit that all but packed up when the vehicle was driving up hill, you could hardly see through the two tiny windows in the back doors but it did sport two wing mirrors and had an indicator button mounted on the top of the steering column. Now there was a vehicle to be proud of if ever there was one. One superb touch was that it also had the benefit of a starting handle that was mounted on clips by the driver's seat for easy access.

Being now mobile Liz and I went everywhere and soon it was decided that I'd use the merry machine to go to work in so without further ado I started driving to Whitehall wireless. From that moment on I always managed to park my Ford Thames 5 cwt van in the little road that went down the side of Admiralty Arch and nobody ever questioned it. Nowadays I'd put money on it that within minutes of parking the area would be cordoned off by the police and the bomb squad and assorted security agencies would be all over the poor old thing.

This vehicle had one particular floor that I was never able eradicate. It had a mind of its own when it came to starting up. Most of the time the pull out starter button would do the trick but just on occasion and usually at the least convenient time it would just not turn over the Bendix starter motor. Now then this was where the extremely long starting handle came

into play and on one particular night at around 2015 I set off for home. Into the heavy traffic I surged but trying to get all the way around Trafalgar Square without getting stopped at any of the innumerable traffic lights is impossible. So it was that we stopped opposite St.Martin's in the Field and promptly stalled, I tugged the starter button, nothing, the lights turned green and I wasn't moving. The cabbies being their usual helpful and happy selves did the only thing that they knew what to do - they hit the horn.

There was only one thing for it – The starting handle – so I got out and reached down to tug the handle out of its clips. This was when a certain level of abuse was being aimed at me until I straightened up with the handle in my hot little hand. You know that moment of power when all of the animosity ebbs and some look just a bit on the wary side wondering what you're going to do with a big weapon in your hand. It only ever took one swing with the SH to get the van going and this night was no different. So I drove off feeling quite smug about the whole incident that probably only lasted 30 seconds.

As always the next day I was out and under the van to take out the starter motor, pour petrol over the Bendix and then replace the “cleaned” object. I got pretty good at this and after a while could turn the whole operation round in five minutes flat.

One evening Liz arrived home and said that she'd been to see her local GP. Gormless here looked at his favourite bird who had a grin a mile wide on her face and asked what for. It's a peculiar feeling you get as a bloke when the word PREGNANT hits you straight between the eyes. You go through every emotion that a chap can – like elation, being dumbstruck, madly in love again, protective, don't you want to sit down and last but not least CORRALED. You're not going anywhere your legs won't move properly, but you want to tell everybody about your news.

The father in law was not amused, he thought that we should have waited a lot longer than we had. Hm!! Moments of passion do not include time levels or any form of coherent thought. NOOKIE is all that the feeble male brain can cope with at that time.

During the next few months we planned and purchased everything that we thought that a new baby would need from baby grows to a pram. In the end it was all too much there is only so much that one child of 1 day will ever want I thought. Wrong day one is just the beginning of what a new baby requires. All that you have to get used to is that from here on in where ever you want to go you will have to lug round with you the trappings of parenthood which equates to about the size of a three piece suite.

In the meantime, in laws have decided to move house. No problem we'll come with you was the immediate reaction. They were transporting themselves from the heart of Hertfordshire to darkest Devon so no chance and from that time on there was the big hunt for new premises to live in.

We finally ended up going after a flat as a new build but would have been homeless for about nine months if we had waited for completion. So we moved from our large accommodation to an equally large flat set over the top of a dentists practice.

The work at the admiralty carried on apace as nothing changed except that I had even more equipment to look after so was glad when a spot of leave came up and I went to work in a glass factory as a general dog's body, but it gave us some extra funds and stopped me getting bored rigid just laying around the house.

Before my leave I'd trained a new kellick in the gentle art of the cipher room operations and had left safe in the knowledge that the place was in good hands. When you are summoned to the OOW's office on the day that you report back the suspicion that all is not well hangs heavy in the air, so in I went.

"Thank God you're back" said a harassed looking OOW "the idiot who stood in for you was absolutely hopeless and lazy and has been sent away on a refresher course". The day could only get better and just for once it did.

Exams and advancement

One point that I'd overlooked in my eagerness to commit all to paper was the battle with advancement courses and the subsequent examinations. Unlike some of the seaman branches who could become highly proficient at their jobs but not necessarily advance in rank, radio ops always had an advancement after having passed.

It was thus that I had two goes at and each time I hit a problem – the Technical side of matters and in some cases the operations of some of the transmitters. The mysteries of the 601,602 and 603 still hold today. The biggest problem was that I only came in contact with those beasts when it was exam times and not operationally on board. The 89Q, 692 and some of the MF transmitters were a doddle as was the mighty 640.

This then caused a big problem in that once having failed your course you were then packed off on draft to anywhere in the world that their Lordships decided.

Bambino number One

The day came when, after several abortive attempts by the nursing staff, that Liz was to be bump started in the giving birth department and so we packed Liz and her small suitcase of necessities into the trusty Ford Thames 5 cwt van and set out for Hertford General Hospital.

We arrived at the appointed hour, went up two storeys to see the head nurses and get settled in. I was thrown out immediately as being superfluous to requirements and so went off back to the van and waited for about half an hour then went back in. Liz by this time had been suitably ensconced in a small individual labour ward (sounds dreadful but in fact was quite ok). The strange thing was that besides the bed there was a chair and a small chest of drawers with a mirror. Why I wondered?

This was when the arm wrestling between us started. Liz's grip and downward push was phenomenal and the strength of this coincided with each contraction and got increasingly stronger. Waters broke, in came the nurses and yours truly was thrown out again. I was invited to go away and do something useful so out I went lit a ciggie, smoked it down to the

tip in two gulps. When I got back to the little room it was empty, the bedding had been changed and it was as if no one had even been in it.

It was intended that I should be at the birth and so like the proverbial spare part I stood around waiting for the call to arms only to be told it would be quite some time before there was any action and that Liz was being looked after in the delivery room.

One of the young nurses took pity on me and made me a cup of tea – all very civilised as there was cup, saucer, teapot and jug of milk etc, Drank the scalding brew down in one and then needed another cigarette so asked the young nurse if it was ok, it wasn't but if I didn't say anything nor would she was my let off.

Now the problem with hospitals is that they don't normally have ashtrays in the wards and in particular the labour wards consequently there was nowhere that I could really stub out without someone noticing. At this point good old navy enterprise and ingenuity came to the fore, I pushed all of the live matches left in my Swan Vesta box to one end and then stubbed out the cigarette at the other. Smooth eh! All went well for about a minute that is until the not completely extinguished cigarette end met with the live red headed matches in the middle of the box. It is absolutely incredible how much of a sulphurous stinking fog that half a box of matches makes especially as the window in the little room wouldn't open to help clear it out.. A new nurse wasn't amused having said that I can only remember her from the waist down as there was really hardly any visibility at all . I was thrown out of the hospital again and told to come back in about 15 minutes, so it was back down the three flights of stairs and out to the car park.

Another cigarette later it was back up and in to the fray – after wandering around for a little while I managed to stop a pretty senior looking nurse and enquired as to when I was going to be suited up. “What for” she said “your wife's has already given birth and you have a lovely bouncing baby daughter”. There you have it I'd missed the whole event and then wasn't allowed to see Liz until visiting time. Just a point Alison came in to the world after a max of four hours of arm wrestling, then along came Caroline after two and finally Jeremy who couldn't contain himself and duly arrived after one. Liz gave birth just like shelling peas.

The Last Dogwatch

The time for me to make a final decision as to whether to sign on was now upon us and we talked long and hard about it. On the one hand we had security of a sort and certainly for the next thirteen years but and it was a big but where would I be drafted to. Was I to be sent out again aboard a ship, was I to have a married accompanied draft to any of our remaining shore bases abroad or for that matter in the UK. Liz wanted me to stay in the mob if I could stay at Whitehall W/T. She couldn't quite grasp that it was my lords and masters who decided my fate and not me. Also I was to be on the next RS course should I sign on so the choices became more and more complicated. Eventually I made the biggie – I wanted to see my daughter and any more that might arrive on the scene grow up, I wanted to see them through the whole of their formative years. I had to leave.

Decision made all I needed now was to try to arrange some employment in time for the big day of 13th March 1968 which was to be my leaving date.

I decided very naively that I was going in to the advertising world so a friend of ours gave me a directory of all of the London advertising agencies. No problem I thought and started sending off the application letters almost straight away. Nothing happened for weeks, I sent some more and then some more and eventually I managed to get three interviews. I was asked to enter competitions for the one or two positions that were being offered so I started with a blank canvass and built a portfolio from scratch. I was turned down at each of the interviews – I didn't have any experience although they said they could see that I had great potential. You can't spend or eat potential so it was out with more letters. According to my mother I sent out 100 letters which in those days was an enormous amount. I never did get into advertising, pity really I might have enjoyed it.

One of the rules for those leaving the navy was that you could spend up to a month working in the civilian world as a forerunner to going outside. I went back to the glass factory just for extra cash and to be at home with Liz and Ali. I suppose I was luckier than most in that since I'd been married I had lived at home and only travelled to work when my duty watch came around. In other words I'd been a civilian, who wore a uniform whilst working, for more than a year so the transition for me was that much easier.

Despair had begun to set in as I got nearer to leaving and there was no employment in sight. Rescue came in the form of an advertisement in The Daily Telegraph – radio and electronics company looking for RN radio personnel to join them as part of their sales team, selling electronic components to the Radio/TV industry. I applied that day and within a week had a firm offer of employment which was to start on the Monday after I was due to leave the service. Sorted.

I suppose that leaving the navy was the one part of my career that will stand out in my memory forever. The guys at Whitehall wanted me to stay on but the die had been cast and so yet another leaving routine had to be conducted and I was sent all the way from London to Portsmouth just to leave.

I had to spend forty eight hours in HMS Victory before being discharged and it was that three or four of us went to the main gate to await the witching hour of 0900 this being the time that we were was officially allowed to leave.

It was at that time that the attitude of the people around us changed we were now no longer one of the band of brothers, no longer on the team. We had become non persons as they literally turned their backs on us.

Not a word of encouragement was said, there were no farewells so all four of us walked out through the gates and went in four different directions never to meet again.