Gunline

Gunline - The First Point of Contact | Published by the Royal Fleet Auxiliary Service | Spring 2011 | www.rfa.mod.uk

DOING THE BUSINESS

The view from Navy Command has been dominated by LARGS BAY for the last few weeks but sadly, very soon the ship will no longer be "ours" as we prepare to hand her over to the Australian Navy. The Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR) has reduced the RFA to 13 ships, so where are they all? Astonishingly only three ships remain around the UK – FORT AUSTIN preparing for a move to her refit yard, GOLD ROVER working up prior to deploying to the South Atlantic later in the summer and ORANGELEAF on home-water tasking.

A total of ten out of our 13 ships, as of May/June 2011 are currently deployed … yes ten out of 13 or 77% if you prefer. This staggering commitment is not just a one-off and will be bettered in early 2012 with 11 out of 13 ships deployed and is a very practical demonstration of the versatility of the flotilla. Post SDSR, with the RN fully stretched, the RFA is in huge demand around the world and the tasks, whether as part of a task group or operating as singleton platforms, we are becoming ever more diverse.

East of Suez, we have LYME BAY demonstrating her utility in operating outside her amphibious role as a crucial element of the Gulf mine-countermeasure operations. FORT VICTORIA is combining national tasking with Gulf Tanker duties. DILIGENCE has become a permanent feature, again on national tasking and recently, ARGUS has joined the group with helicopters embarked.

In the Mediterranean, or en-route, we have CARDIGAN BAY, MOUNTS BAY, FORT ROSALIE and WAVE KNIGHT as part of the Cougar group. Part of this deployment will continue through the Suez Canal at which point the RFA will have just fewer than 50% of ships in the Gulf operating area.

All the ships in the Gulf and Mediterranean will have a part in any relief or evacuation operation which arises from the current unrest in the region.

Further afield, we have BLACK ROVER in the South Atlantic and finally WAVE RULER as the sole naval ship in the Caribbean. The latter will cover counter narcotics and disaster relief aided by an embarked flight, naval party and US Coast Guard unit in the absence of any station warship.

At a time of considerable change following the SDSR, we are seeing one of the most intensive periods of activity since Op TELIC associated with significant levels of unrest across the Middle East and North Africa. It is reassuring that the RFA continues to thrive based on its ability to deliver a broad range of maritime operational support for the RN.

Commodore Bill Walworth

The RFA is as busy as ever , doing what we do best, keeping ships at sea on operations around the world. Meanwhile HQ staf f face daily challenges at the shore end of operations. This edition of Gunline gives colour to the cover story and a flavour of the tempo of operations and breadth of activity of our men and women at sea and ashore. The modern RFA is at the heart of the Royal Navy's operations, carrying out a range of tasks inconceivable twenty years ago, utilising the well trained people, versatile and capable ships of our service.

I normally name check deployed ships, but limited space means restricting myself to Captain Paul Kehoe and the team in ARGUS, now deployed east of Suez. ARGUS was at sea on a training task when the decision to deploy her was taken. 24 hours later she was back in port and within a day sailed for the Mediterranean reconfigured for a range of tasks with a large number of Royal Marines and Fleet Air Arm embarked. This was an excellent demonstration of the ability of maritime forces to change tasks in short order , and of the professionalism of the ships company, a mixed team of RFA, Royal Navy, Royal Marines and Fleet Air Arm.

The three ships we are losing post SDSR are now back in the UK, winding down for disposal. LARGS BAY has been purchased by the Royal Australian Navy, the futures of BA YLEAF and FORT GEORGE are undecided. They have all distinguished themselves across the globe. While we are sad to lose the ships, hardest is saying goodbye to a number of people who have made the ships and the RFA the successful organisation we are. I am confident they will be volunteers but we will be no less sorry to see them go. The management board is determined to re-assure the RFA community we remain a great or ganisation to be in.

I've mentioned the National Arboretum previously and you have seen the artist's impression. Everyone thinks we should have a memorial, now we must find the money . £10 or more from everyone in the RF A, active or retired, will pay for it and everyone donating to the project will have their name recorded in a smart book to commemorate the occasion. Details of how to contribute are on the community web and we will send details and forms to each ship. Our aim is to make donating as simple as possible.

His Royal Highness The Earl Of Wessex has kindly agreed to open the RF A memorial in 2012. We are delighted that Her Majesty the Queen has appointed Prince Edward as Commodore in Chief of the RFA in the rank of commodore. He continues to show great interest in our achievements, for which we are very grateful.

Its been a long and dif ficult few months and the RFA has risen to every challenge with professionalism and expertise. Well done all of you. I hope you enjoy this action packed Gunline.

DUCHESS OF CORNWALL VISITS SPECIALIST NAVY SUPPORT SHIP

The Duchess of Cornwall paid a visit to the Royal Navy's specialist medical support ship in Portsmouth.

In her capacity as Commodore-in-Chief, Royal Naval Medical Services, Her Royal Highness saw the hi-tech facilities and met personnel on board RF A Argus at the city's naval base.

HRH was shown the ship' s 100-bed hospital facility including intensive care and high dependency units and two 35-bed general wards plus the ship's two operating theatres.

The facilities allow RFA Argus to deploy to war zones as a Primary Casualty Receiving Facility, ensuring wounded servicemen of all nationalities can receive swift care.

Argus also doubles as an aviation training ship – more than two thirds of her length is given over to a flight deck to accommodate any of the Royal Navy' s helicopters.

RFA Argus' Hospital Officer Lt Sam Adams said: "It is a great privilege for HRH Duchess of Cornwall to see the facilities onboard Argus in her capacity of Commodore-in-Chief of Naval Medical Services. It is dif ficult to comprehend quite what an amazing facility we have until you see it first hand."

RFA Argus is programmed to undertake a series of exercises this summer Later in the year she will return to her secondary role of aviation training.

RFA LARGS BAY – THE FINAL CHAPTER

RFA LARGS BAY conducted her final operational tasking as an RFA on 1st December 2010. A planned series of deck landing training (DLT) over two days for 657 Squadron of the Army Air Corps was regrettably curtailed due to extreme levels of cold weather, seldom seen in the English Channel. Initially braving freezing temperatures and 35kt winds, the small but dedicated flight deck team soldiered on through day and night flying serials. However, when the aircraft returned to base overnight, heavy falls of snow precluded a return to the ship and a resulted in a premature end to the ship's final military tasking.

The snow that occurred that night was the first and heaviest of the season. Continuous heavy snow fell from just before midnight until mid morning the next day, leaving several inches on exposed areas including all the decks and small drifts in some corners. Forced to stand down from flying stations, the ship returned to the sanctuary of Portland Port a day earlier than anticipated, to be greeted by coastal scenery more akin to that of Norway than the Jurassic Coast of Dorset. With the future of the ship still to be formally announced, the process of de-storing for any possible eventuality was commenced.

This final operational commitment concluded a relatively short but active service life, during which LARGS BAY has proved the full extent of LSDA extensive capability and versatility in a number of roles. Although primarily an amphibious landing platform, the ship became a frequent participant in the USCG fronted anti-narcotic patrols in the Caribbean Sea, with capability enhanced by permanently embarked Lynx aircraft from 845 Sqn Yeovilton. Her ability to remain on station for extended periods was demonstrated by the conduct of her intermediate refit period in Charleston, USA, thus maintaining a presence in theatre for considerably longer than if having to return to UK.

Her final year in service was arguably her busiest ever, returning to the Caribbean and the hurricane ravaged Haiti in a high profile humanitarian mission earning recognition, praise and plaudits from around the world for her considerable assistance. A rapid re-roling effort saw the ship again cross "the pond" forming part of an impressive Amphibious Task Group and the opportunity to demonstrate her prowess in core business military tasking.

Between her many trans-Atlantic ventures, LARGS BAY has frequently flown the flag around the UK coast with regular visits to the town of Largs on the Clyde estuary as well as support to Help for Heroes charity events in the English Channel and as aback drop to the Bournemouth Air Show. Throughout her eventful period of RFA service she has been home to a proud and highly motivated ships company, who have consistently aimed to uphold the high reputation of the service and showcase the ship to best effect. Completion of operational tasking brought the ship neatly to what was then thought to very likely be LARGS BAY's final Christmas and New Year in the UK, a quiet occasion onboard, allowing time for reflection, with many of the ship's company taking leave to enjoy the festive season at home with their families. However, the opportunity was taken to boost the Christmas cheer amongst neighbouring RFAs MOUNTS BAY and WAVE KNIGHT by donating our extensive stock of decorations for their future use. A similar theme has been evident with many other items of non-ship specific equipment and stores, ensuring that it is recycled within the fleet or stored appropriately for posterity.

The 7th of January was Non-Fleet Date, when operational control of the ship was transferred from FLEET to DE&S and LARGS ceased to be available for operational tasking, another step on the road to disposal. The 12th of January saw the start of Largs' likely final voyage under a blue ensign, struggling once more against the winter weather of the English Channel. Where the last operational day at sea had been against the wind and cold, this time it was the spectre of restricted visibility. Fog had all but closed Portland Port, visibility being reduced to less than 500 yards. Portland was not letting us go without a fight with the breakwater entrance being entirely obscured until a very late but reassuring view of the gap through East Ship Channel. All that valuable blind pilotage training combined with the high levels of technology available ensured the ship commenced her final voyage to Portsmouth.

With the fog giving way to gales, the opportunity to stretch the ship's "legs" for the final time was taken to ensure the propulsion machinery was given a good workout prior to the anticipated extended period of idle running. As daylight broke, the visibility was back to its worst, around 1000 yards as we passed Outer Spit Buoy and into the channel leading to Portsmouth Harbour with 25 knot cross winds adding to the challenge of a low profile final harbour entry and eventual berthing on Fountain Lake Jetty.

As LARGS BAY continues the gradual de-store process towards withdrawal from service later in the year, her future has still to be decided. The RFA personnel who remain onboard over this period of transition can be justly proud that they have served in this fine ship which has provided sterling military and humanitarian support through a short but distinguished service career. Looking to her three sisters to carry forward the LSDA banner within the RFA, LARGS BAY will be sadly missed and fondly remembered by all who have sailed in her.

FLEXIBILITY IS THE KEY FOR ARGUS

RFA Argus has again proved her flexibility by quickly changing from a flying training platform to one ready to support humanitarian operations and then again to support counter-piracy, all within six short weeks.

RFA Argus was busy conducting Merlin helicopter flying training off the south coast of England in February when she received orders to go alongside in Portland Harbour to receive supplies prior to a short notice deployment to the coast of Libya.

Within a week, Argus was off the Libyan Coast ready to assist in the evacuation of British and other entitled people from the troubled country. She supported the operation for 10 days until it became clear that no further people needed to be brought out of

the country by sea. Argus then made her way to Cyprus for a well earned day-alongside, taking on stores and provisions.

New teams also joined. 824 Naval Air Squadron (NAS), which had been embarked in their training role, were relieved by 820 NAS, keeping the same helicopters but making sure that the Navy's frontline maritime surveillance Squadron were embarked.

The detachment from Fleet Protection Group Royal Marines also went home after lengthy deployments throughout the Middle East. They were replaced by members of B Company, 40 Commando Royal Marines who, with their recent operational experience in Afghanistan in 2010, were now trained and ready to return to sea, providing a highly capable armed-team to support any future operation Argus may find herself involved with.

With all the preparations in place, Argus was ordered to head towards the Suez Canal in preparation for her next tasking – counter-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden. With the fine weather that comes between the monsoon seasons, piracy tends to increase, so a large ship with 3 Merlin helicopters and their impressive surveillance capabilities is ideal to support the multinational operation in the region.

Argus has now been on patrol off Puntland in the Gulf of Aden, providing a reassuring sight to merchant ships and a deterrent to potential pirates, for four weeks. Argus has been working closely with Royal Fleet Auxiliary, Royal Navy, and Coalition Ships, ensuring that there is a full picture of all the shipping transiting one of the world's busiest shipping lanes and regularly launching the embarked Merlin Helicopters to identify potential pirates. Whilst doing so, Argus has also helped to ensure that best-practice anti-piracy measures are in place by giving practical advice to the merchant shipping.

Captain Paul Kehoe RFA, the Commanding Officer of RFA Argus, said whilst the Ship was on counter-piracy patrol:

"We have been able to quickly and successfully adapt to each new tasking. It's been very satisfying to see all the hard training pay off and I'm very impressed

and pleased with the way my team have integrated and adapted for each new role."

RFA Argus continues to conduct counter-piracy patrols in the Gulf of Aden.

WE'RE COMING HOME OUR TIME IS DONE

After almost three years, to the day, having travelled around 71,500 miles, with the ship's company having been awarded hundreds of medals, 24 patrols into the Northern Arabian Gulf, 40 port visits, albeit limited to only five ports, the training of hundreds of personnel from the Iraqi Navy and Marines, 30 RAS's both issuing and receiving fuel; Cardigan Bay has been released from OP Telic, the charts have been drawn, the stores loaded, goodbyes said and the ship has headed home.

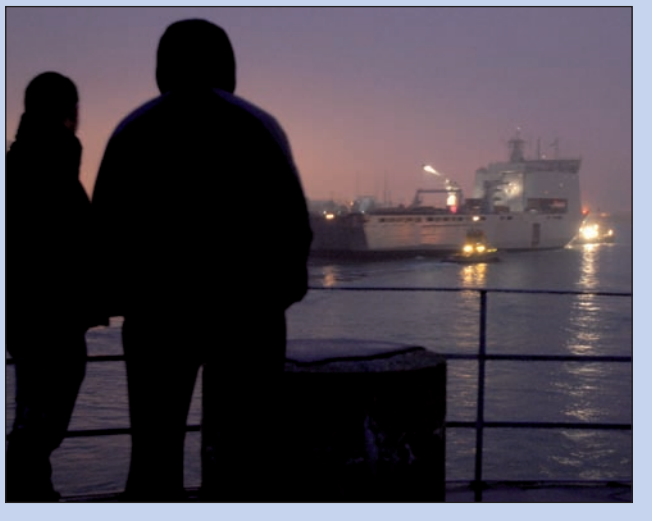
The Gulf, as one of the region's longest serving maritime units, and the RFA's longest serving deployed vessel heads home. While there are mixed feelings onboard, between looking forward to getting home and leaving the high profile, prestigious deployment one thing is for certain, that forces in the Northern Arabian Gulf (NAG) and also throughout the Gulf will notice the loss of the most versatile and hard working vessel of Op Telic.

Over the last three years the vessel has not only been the workplace and home of personnel for the UK armed services but she has also hosted personnel from the United States Navy and Marines, Iraqi Navy and Marines, and many more navies. Outside the ship's conference room there is a long line of citations, plaques and tributes from our allies, praising RFA Cardigan Bay. Proof of the high regard in which the ship is held by the coalition forces and evidence that the ship has raised the profile and reputation of the RFA. There have been many medals awarded, including an OBE to Captain Nigel Jones in recognition of Cardigan Bay's contribution to the stability of the region.

The legacy left by Cardigan Bay in the gulf region will be of the Iraqi Naval service that was trained in aspects of marine warfare and seagoing life by the crew of Cardigan Bay. The ship has had a key role in the re-forging of the Iraqi Navy and will hopefully this will be forever ingrained in their history books. The long hours put in by all onboard to train these men and the welcome they were given will hopefully serve as a memory to the people of Iraq for years to come.

Looking to the future the trip home through the Mediterranean will be a refreshing change with time at sea on passage as opposed to being in a "box" patrol. There will also be a couple of port visits before arriving home early in the New Year for a welcome reunion with "Old Blighty". With over half of the current crew having been on 'NAG Patrol' aboard Cardigan Bay at some point over the last three years, it will feel like a real homecoming.

So as the sun sets on Cardigan Bay's Op Telic, the end of one chapter means the beginning of the next, we wait to see what it may bring.



THE LAST PATROL

The sun has finally set on RFA Bayleaf's last Patrol as the Arabian Gulf Ready Tanker (ARGT) in support of the Royal Navy and Coalition Warships conducting operations in the Middle East. It is time to reflect on her long and industrious career and the ship's company time in this theatre of operation.

After completing a £9m refit at Cammell Lairds in Birkenhead and conducting Basic Operational Sea Training at Plymouth, Bayleaf set sail from UK for the last time to take up duties as AGRT under the Command of 'Owner' Captain Charlie Simmons way back in October 2009.

Since transiting Suez in Nov 09 and as the name AGRT suggests, Bayleaf has been required to be at 60 minutes notice, day and night, to conduct replenishments at sea (RAS) with any of the RN or Coalition warships within the Arabian Gulf and those in support of counter piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden and wider Somali Basin.

During this deployment port visits were mainly restricted to Bahrain and Dubai; however the latter was affectionately given the honour of being a 'base port' by proxy. Patrols at sea were generally around six weeks long. Over the years, Dubai has offered some welcome respite for the Ship's Company to recharge their batteries and to have some R and R time after each patrol, spaced around crucial maintenance routines, cargo loading and the general regeneration of Operational Capability. Bayleaf has seen the dramatic development of the City that has now become a true wonder. On each occasion, but particularly on this final call, personnel took every opportunity to visit the spectacular malls, which included attractions such as the world's tallest building the Burj Khalifa (828m / 2717 feet), ski slopes and a huge aquarium diving pool. For many the Seaman's Mission was a welcome escape where BBQ's and just relaxing by the pool was a common pastime. Bartering skills were fully utilised when buying gifts for loved ones in the various souks for purchase's ranging from jewelry to spice's; Al Karama being a favourite call.

Snow skiing in the desert is somewhat bizarre, and the indoor facilities at the Mall of the Emirates, where the ski centre is located are second to none. A couple of hours skiing with all the equipment cost 200dhs (£35). XO Rick Taylor, Navs Lee Marriott, 2/O(X) Stuart '*I've skied before*' Smith and LSO Alex Grant took up the

Ch Off X Rick Taylor, 2/OX Lee Marriott, 2/O LSO Alec Grant and 2/OX Stuart Smith

challenge and had a spectacular day. The LSO cheated however and used a snow board, Stuart quickly relinquished his expert status and was seen clinging to the netting with fear and panic written all over his face! The rest of the session saw him go round and round on the chairlift. All survived without any injuries to themselves and retired gracefully to indulge in a bit of après ski. A challenge soccer match between BAYLEAF OILERS and Diligence Thunderbolts was arranged and after a hard fought battle under flood lights, Diligence stole the honours by winning 7-5, the Ref was supplied by Dil and apparently claims of bribery were totally unfounded. Disappointingly there were no offers of a contract from any premier league teams.

The winter weather affects the Gulf region in a different manner to the UK, and although very mild and pleasant, the area is subject to frequent Shammal's. This is a regional prevailing strong wind which blows from the North West, frequently reaching over 40 knots and can include heavy rain, hailstones and snow in the North of the Persian Gulf. Such precipitation was always to the delight of the XO and the Bosun CPO Shaun 'Stan' Stanbury with the rain washing down the ship and clearing away the fine sand. This also made for challenging RAS and Harbour maneuvering conditions.

Bayleaf returned to Dubai in Mid February for this final port visit. To mark the occasion, the ship's company mustered on the focsle for a team photograph that was taken from the bow of the QE2 by Captain (E) Bob Smith. This panoramic picture eventually turned out to be rather large with the sky line of Dubai in the

Members of RFA Bayleaf ship's company touring the QEII.

back ground and the port in the foreground – truly epic! Two of the photographs were mounted, framed and signed by all aboard, and these will be presented to the RFA Association and Angela Pritchard, Bayleaf's Lady Sponsor as a fitting memento to the ship's final chapter.

Before departure, the Officer's Mess held a reception to say farewell to the 'home' from home port that had supported her for some 12 years of her life. Guest's included Port Authorities and Agency representatives, and Seaman's Mission staff. Captain Simmons thanked all for their support and made an appropriate presentation to each. The opportunity was also taken to reflect on the life of Chief Officer (E) Mike Kitchen, often appointed to Bayleaf who had recently passed away. Mike was well known in the Dubai mission and he used the facilities as his 'local'. A commemorative brass tally and ships crest was presented to the Manager, which has been mounted in the 'Bridge' bar in his memory.

Sailing on the 14th February, Bayleaf commenced her last AGRT patrol. The opportunity was taken to maintain the high level of ship's operational capability by firing the ship's weapons, with teams obliterating the target using the Mk 44 miniguns, GPMG and 20mm GAMBO. The ship's company was also put through their paces by conducting man over board's, quick draw drills, and, fire and damage control exercises. New joiners wet drills, under the guidance of PO(Q) Michael Donkin, ensured that personnel were quickly assimilated into the organisation, thus ensuring the ship remained ready to react to any threat.

Our replenishment role continued, one of the final AGRT serials conducted with HMS Cumberland who was also coming to the end of her proud naval career.

With RFA Lyme Bay sailing past to say good bye, Bayleaf finally slipped out of Persian Gulf waters towards the end of February. The task was to rendezvous with RFA Fort Victoria to conduct the formal handover as AGRT, where around 6 million litres of fuel was exchanged and solid stores transferred via heavy jackstay before the ships went their separate ways.

The passage towards and through Suez was uneventful, however the ship's company were on particularly high alert during the transit of the pirate waters where, given the reported tensions in the area Bayleaf remained available to assist UKMCC and later Fleet as tasking arose.

Inevitably we were instructed to replenish units on OP DEFERENCE, the National Evacuation Operation from Libya meeting up and replenishing RFA Argus and HMS Westminster. These turned out to be Bayleaf's final operational replenishments, the ship continuing to prove her capabilities to the end.

Barcelona, the last foreign visit provided a welcome respite on the passage home allowing some lucky families/ partners to visit the ship after several months apart. As the delights of the City were enjoyed accompanied by tapas and the occasional glass of Rioja, it was with some sadness that we contemplated the imminent return home for the final time before the ship's de-store and retirement.

Over a career spanning 29 years Bayleaf has sailed 1.4 Million miles in support of ships world wide, conducting over 5000 replenishment serials. She has supported UK and coalition warships through the Falklands conflict, both Gulf wars, Humanitarian Operations and an unprecedented 12 years as the Arabian Gulf Ready Tanker. She has a long and proud service history and we, the final crew, are honored to be a part of her story. The RFA Ensign will be lowered for the last time at sunset on 20 April; a small function being planned to commemorate the faithful service of the ship and to honour the memory of all who have served to ensure that UK forces are properly supported throughout this uncertain world.

Farewell and adieu.

RFA WAVE KNIGHT - WINNER OF THE JORDAN TROPHY

The winner of the Jordan Trophy for the period covering 1st October 2010 to 1st April 2011 is RFA WAVE KNIGHT. During her five weeks of Operational Sea Training (OST), the Command Safety Team, Weapon Crews and Maintainers gave an exemplary performance, resulting in the ship achieving a 'Very Satisfactory' assessment for Above Water Warfare (AWW). This also incorporated the new Phalanx weapon fit, prior to deployment East of Suez. The Point Defence Officer (PDO) excelled throughout, leading the team to success in GUNNEX, SURFEX, ADEX, WAR, CASEX, SPE and NMT Serials.

Captain R Allan OBE, OPS 1/O(X) A Holmes, NAVS 1/O(X) W Mullen, PDO 2/(X) J Greenland, WMO 3/O(E) M EVES and WMR MM1 R Hunt.

A Streamlined Route to Academic and Professional Recognition for RFA Engineer Officers and Ratings

Like many RFA and commercial sea-going engineers, I often wondered why the Institute of Marine Engineers, Science and Technology (IMarEST) no longer appeared to value the knowledge, skills and experience of the very people it was set up to serve. This perception was proven to have some substance by many of us who, even as Chief Engineer Officer's, found that we couldn't be a full Member of the Institute without an engineering degree and couldn't hope to be a Fellow without a Master's degree.

Whilst studying for my own Master's degree, I discovered that I already possessed several of the learning outcomes that the IMarEST and the Engineering Council (EC) demanded for the academic and professional award for Fellow and Chartered membership respectively. I had achieved this through my own HND cadetship, Class 1 Certificate of Competency, Advanced Command and Staff Course and most importantly, the professional competence acquired through the various appointments I have held over the course of my career.

When I approached Mr Ben Saunders, the recently appointed IMarEST Learning and Development Manager, I found an ally in that he was focused solely on the competencies that could be proven by the individual against the required standards. The route that the individual had taken to obtain them was of secondary importance but still very relevant. Here was a man I could work with!

Ben and I set about benchmarking all of the RFA engineering related qualifications, training courses, skills and Terms of Reference for various ranks and appointments against the standards required for the different levels of professional accreditation set by both the IMarEST and the EC. This was a laborious task most of which was carried out in the evenings and took nine months to complete.

Our case was then sent via the Institute's Professional Affairs and Education Committee (PAEC) to the EC for approval. Prior to the PAEC approving our case, they sent a team of academics and Chartered Engineers to HQ to inspect our training records, examine our business processes, witness it all in action and speak with staff and trainees in the shore training establishments. They also visited a ship the next day to

The President of IMarEST, Adm Nigel Guild and on the right the Chief Executive Officer of IMarEST Dr Marcus Jones presenting the IMarEST Certification of Accreditation to Capt (E) David Smith

speak with the crew, to ensure that what we were delivering at the sharp end of the business and was the same as we said we were achieving in the office. It was a very thorough process and I am particularly pleased to say that we passed with flying colours and that the EC subsequently granted their approval.

So what does it mean to all of us in the Marine and Systems Engineering branch? The clue is in the title of this article and if you visit the IMarEST website you will see exactly what it means to you. The website contains all of the guidance and forms that you need to read and complete in order to determine your suitability for the various levels of professional and academic awards. Please do not be under the misapprehension that this is something for nothing, although you can claim your subscription fees back from the MoD via your appointer on MoD Form 1108. You will have to work hard to be successful but you will now get automatic approval and recognition for the level of experience and qualifications you already possess. The link is as follows:

http://www.imarest.org/Membership/Professional Registration/StreamlinedRegistration/RoyalFleet Auxiliary.aspx

One of the visiting panel members, Capt John McGrath RN Rtd, former Dean of Manadon and the University of South Wales, sent me a letter following the visit that said, "It was a delight to be dealing with such a professional organisation. In fact, it was extremely difficult to find any fault at all with your system and its implementation, which is a very unusual position to be in. As well as thanking you personally, I'd be most grateful if you would pass on my thanks to all those, both officers and ratings, who were involved in the visit. They were all a credit to the organisation and their straightforward responses to questioning served as an indication as to how well-developed and fit-for-purpose your training system is. In naval terms, please, give them all a BZ. With many thanks and best wishes for the future".

Given that these panel members travel all over the world examining and accrediting academic organisations, I think we can all be justifiably proud of our engineering staff and the standards that they uphold.

By CSO (E) Capt David Smith CEng CMarEng FIMarEST

VISIT OF RFA FORT GEORGE TO TYNESIDE, HER AFFILIATED PORT

RFA Fort George returned to her birthplace on the Tyne for the last time on Thursday December 9th 2010. The ship was built on the River Tyne by the Swan Hunter ship yard and entered service in 1994.

Whilst in South Tyneside, the Ship's affiliated port, the Captain and Ship's Company hosted a number of

events for local people, promoting and reinforcing RFA Fort George's long standing affiliation with the town.

The Commanding Officer, Captain James Murchie, hosted a lunch on Friday December 10th, alongside Northumbrian Quay, for local dignitaries including the Mayor of the borough of South Tyneside council, Thomas Piggott, and Commodore Baum, Naval Regional Commander (Northern England).

Later that evening, the ship's company hosted an evening reception for local dignitaries, South Tyneside Maritime College, Swan Hunter ship builders, Rolls Royce engineering, the RFA Association, South Tyneside Sea Cadets and some of the ship's previous long standing senior officers.

The clearway was bedecked with the flags of nations, and the evening was most convivial. A number of 'old faces' put in an appearance, and many dits surfaced, reminiscing about past trips, people, and events.

Whilst alongside, the ship also hosted ship's tours for local schools and Boys Brigade groups, which were very well received by all and they were rounded off with tea and sticky buns.

RFA Fort George departed from Crombie with, in addition to the normal ship's complement, thirty three members of the Royal Navy Fleet Protection Group (RNFPG). The RNFPG undertook platform familiarisation in readiness for future deployments on our sister ship RFA Fort Victoria, and gunnery training whilst in transit between ports.

RFA Fort George formed part of Operation Auriga in the Eastern Seaboard of the United States and Canada, which focused on counter narcotics and developing a co-ordinated multi-national reaction force. Whilst in Canada, RFA Fort George participated in a number of Navy Days, which were attended by HM The Queen. On arrival back in the UK, RFA Fort George participated in the British led multi national warfare training exercise, Joint Warrior. More recently, the ship has completed a three week Operational Flying Training exercise with 848 Squadron, then on to Crombie to de-ammunition. After the visit to North Shields, RFA Fort George will commence a

programme of maintenance and de-storing in preparation for decommissioning in Spring 2011.

The Captain James Murchie said "I very much enjoyed welcoming our visitors on board in our affiliated port of South Tyneside, and feel it was only fitting that we took the opportunity to celebrate the strength of our links with the area before the ship is decommissioned. I have been enormously proud to serve as RFA Fort George's Captain, proud of her achievements, and those of her Ships Company."

RFA CENTENARY WEDGWOOD BOWL - RFA FORT VICTORIA - 2010
COUNTER PIRACY OPERATIONS

The contribution by RFA FORT VICTORIA towards the multinational effort to curb piracy in the Somali Basin in the autumn of 2010 achieved a significant positive effect in the region. Efforts aimed at not only disrupting pirate activity but patrolling within sight of the coast introduced a human element which served to reassure legitimate traders and fishermen, therefore providing security for those determined to live a peaceful existence. When approached to gauge pattern of life, fishermen often commented that they felt safer when in sight of RFA FORT VICTORIA.

RFA FORT VICTORIA departed the UK on 29 August 2010, embarked multi-badged personnel in Crete and continued on passage East. RFA FORT VICTORIA's capability was enhanced with both people and equipment in a form not seen outside of major conflict. This enhancement saw the galley working at full capacity and the engineering team operating tirelessly to maintain availability not only for propulsion and power generation, but also the full extent of services required to maintain habitability when operating beyond full capacity. RFA FORT VICTORIA provided a boarding capability using a combination of fast boats and Royal Marines, while the Merlin helicopter provided a search and reconnaissance capability to locate the pirates and monitor their preparations ashore. The ship patrolled continuously and when required the deck teams launched and recovered ship's boats to intercept pirate craft. Additionally, and most importantly, they stopped to talk to local fishermen to gain a greater understanding of activity and concerns in the region. Differentiating between pirate and fisherman was the key to building up trust and understanding on both sides of the divide.

Overall, 63 Merlin sorties were completed and proved essential in identifying pirate activity on the beaches. Coupled with careful analysis by a small intelligence team, individual pirate boats were fingerprinted, stores stockpiles identified and vehicles tracked all of which contributed to the identification of the pirate footprint. Of note, the intelligence product was the finest achieved in the region to date. This level of detail showed a number of pirate groups ready to deploy and due to the presence of RFA FORT VICTORIA, 18 swarms were disrupted in doing so.

At times acting as a singleton, RFA FORT VICTORIA's significant efforts contributed in large to addressing an international problem achieving a far greater effect by the utility, flexibility and capability inherent within the platform. Additionally, the ability to operate alongside multi-national partners in order to broaden overall effect RFA FORT VICTORIA successfully integrated with coalition units and latterly operated under NATO Command in addition to supporting the work of the European Union Task Group. The ability to share information and seamlessly switch Commands while maintaining mission continuity further enhanced the profile of RFA FORT VICTORIA whilst demonstrating the UK's strategic commitment to this multinational effort and contributing to International relations as a whole.

RFA FORT VICTORIA completed her counter-piracy operation in 2010 and the destruction of pirate boats and equipment has had a visible effect and attracted much media coverage. The work of RFA FORT VICTORIA and her Ship's Company ensured that numerous Merchant Ships, their crews and cargoes made safe and unhindered passage through otherwise troubled waters. The number of pirates either dissuaded or disrupted has contributed overall towards making this area of the world's oceans a little safer. For her outstanding significant role, RFA FORT VICTORIA has been awarded the RFA Centenary Wedgwood Bowl for 2010.

CHARLESTON MARATHON WEEKEND

On the 15th January 2011, four members of Wave Rulers ship's company took part in the Charleston Half Marathon and 10K races. It was a cold but sunny morning, ideal for a Saturday morning run. Participants from the ship in the half marathon, 3/O Wyatt and MM1 Pells, arrived in Downtown Charleston at 0800 for the start of the race.

The route headed down to the coast and then turned back on itself and into town, heading through the main high street and then out onto the main road to North Charleston and then finishing 500 metres from where the ship was berthed in the Navy Yard. 3/O Wyatt finished 135th in 1hr 42min and MM1 Pells finishing in 247th with a time of 1hr 52min out of a total of 653 finishers.

L-R: 3/O(X) Pierre Wyatt, MM1 Steven Pells, MM1 Chris Mckinlay and MMI Martin Bradshaw

Additionally the 10K race was ran by MM1 Bradshaw and MM1 Mckinley. The 10K route started and finished just outside the Navy Yard again commencing at 0800 on the same morning. MM1 McKinley finished 42nd with a time of 50:12min and MM/SE Bradshaw was 56th in 52:47min out of 157.

It was an excellent opportunity for the keen runners in the ship to get the chance to demonstrate their landbased hobbies and all the runners deserve recognition for their achievement in what was a very competitive day of sport.

MEDAL AWARD – STEWARD STEPHEN 'SPEEDY' JOYCE

RFA Fort George's recent port visit to South Tyneside saw an event much welcomed by the ship's company; the posthumous award of a Long Service medal to Tracey Joyce, widow of the late Steward Stephen 'Speedy' Joyce.

Speedy sadly passed away in 2009 whilst on a BSSC course, and is fondly remembered by those of us who sailed with him, for his dry wit and ever present jumbo sized mug of coffee.

Captain (LS) Rupert Drew, presenting the medal, said "Stephen, or 'Speedy' as we all knew him, was known by many in the RFA, due to his long service. In fact, when I asked the appointers for information on Stephen,

Captain Drew presenting Tracey Joyce with Stephen's Long Service medal on RFA Fort George

the reply was 'What, Speedy?'. When I looked back at his history with the RFA, his record was blemish free, due to his exemplary conduct. It gives me great pleasure to present this medal to his family tonight in recognition of his long and dedicated service to the RFA."

Tracey, her daughter Amy and son Stephen also attended an evening reception hosted by the ship, where many of Speedy's old shipmates had tales of him to recount.

Tracey said "I have always been a frequent visitor to RFA ships, and have always felt welcome, and indeed part of the RFA family. Stephen was very passionate about the RFA and wouldn't have wanted to have worked anywhere else."

By 3/O(LS) Nikki Lutman

RFA FORT GEORGE HANDS OVER CUSTODY OF THE WILKINSON SWORD OF PEACE TO 820 NAVAL AIR SQUADRON

A ceremony was held on board Fort George on Tuesday 15 Feb to formally transfer custody of The Wilkinson Sword of Peace from RFA Fort George to 820 Naval Air Squadron (NAS).

The sword was originally presented to both RFA Fort George and 820 NAS on the 8 Nov 2001 for displaying an outstanding level of commitment and ingenuity to the task of providing aid to the people of Mozambique in 2000 during OP BARWOOD.

The Wilkinson Sword Company has presented an annual Sword of Peace to an establishment or unit of each service which was judged to have made the most valuable contribution towards establishing good and friendly relations with the inhabitants of any community at home or overseas, over and above the unit's normal role and duty.

Captain J Murchie hands over the Wilkinson Sword of Peace citation to Cdr Jason Phillips RN CO of 820 NAS

As RFA Fort George is now being taken out of service it was deemed fitting that the new home for the Sword of Peace should be 820 NAS as the co-recipient of the award back in 2001. This record of one of Fort George's past achievement can now live on through the Wilkinson Sword of Peace in its new home at RNAS Culdrose. The sword will be put on display alongside other mementos of 820's time in Mozambique, an old wooden canoe was mentioned as an additional memento.

Cdr Jason Phillips CO of 820 NAS said, "He was proud to receive the sword on behalf of his squadron…."

Chief Officer M Bunker returning 820 NAS signed photo which had previously been presented to the ship by the squadron

and assured Captain Murchie that should Fort George be resurrected the sword would be returned.

August William Victor Biadacz (Oggy)

19 August 1953 – 4 February 2011

As many will be aware, Oggy was a Systems Engineer Officer in the RFA, and as the Head of the Systems Engineering Specialisation, I had the honour to represent Oggy's colleagues and shipmates within the RFA at his funeral as we celebrated his life.

Oggy joined the Royal Fleet Auxiliary Service in October 1984 as a Junior Electrical Officer having transferred from working in Devonport Dockyard and completed his first appointment on RFA REGENT.

Through the subsequent years, Oggy sailed on several different classes of ship within the RFA when in February 1989, his conscientiousness and professionalism were recognised and he was promoted to First Officer (Electrical).

At work he was extremely conscientious ensuring that the job was complete before he knocked off often being the last to leave the engine room, even if his work was complete but others were not, this was one of his finest attributes, his willingness to assist others and put the ship and his shipmates before himself.

During his career, Oggy sailed on O Class Tankers - OLMEDA and OLNA, the AFSHs - FORT GRANGE AND FORT AUSTIN, the AOR - FORT VICTORIA as well as ARGUS and DILIGENCE.

Oggy was a quiet, calm and collected man, preferring on runs ashore to visit the local cultural sights, perhaps buy a small souvenir, a refreshing change from the more usual sailor's "hair cut" run ashore to the nearest bar.

He was always in good humour and ready to give a smile, shipmates have told me of occasions particularly on gruelling exercises during 'Work ups' at the hands of Flag Officer Sea Training, where the Ship was being criticised and moral on board would drop like a stone, he would appear with a bag of sweets, a winning smile, saying not to worry we'll do better tomorrow.

His enthusiasm, considerable technical knowledge and experience in all areas of Systems Engineering both in the sea going role and when in refits, together with his polite and helpful nature brought him a deep and deserved respect not only from his peers, the ship's companies but also from the ship repairer organisations with which he worked.

He was prepared to put in as many hours as necessary in order to successfully achieve the task and he demonstrated a keen commitment to the mentoring and developing of Junior Officers and POs.

He rose to the challenge of not only serving afloat but also accepted the wider responsibilities of working ashore. In May of 1992 he was appointed to Section 75A in Empress State Building where one of his many tasks was the development of the Domstock Engineering Project, aimed at delivering the first computer based planned maintenance system, the legacy he created formed the foundation for a system which has lasted nearly two decades.

From Section 75A in London he transferred to Portsmouth with the newly vested organisation of the RFA Type Command. In such a new organisation he was key in establishing and building the solid relationships between organisations within the dockyard, so essential in ensuring the future success of the organisation.

Throughout his sea going appointments he sought to further his career with training courses which addressed all aspects of the electrical and electronic engineering, he was a keen supporter of the Systems Engineering philosophy undertaking the cross training courses applicable to the Systems Engineer Officer's role on board ship.

His idea of celebrating after passing his radar exams was to enjoy a pint of beer, just the one, and of course a bag of chips. He completed his HND in July 2001 which he undertook external to the RFA.

During a shore appointment in the RFA Support IPT, Oggy was required to travel to Singapore following the fire on board RFA DILIGENCE. He was tasked with examining the damage from the fire in the lower generator room and working with the ship repairer to oversee the rectification package to return the Ship to service.

Oggy was seen as one of the few officers that had the experience, knowledge and above all the enthusiasm to tackle such a project, a challenge he quickly accepted and completed with absolute professionalism.

As you would expect, he threw himself into the task and often had to be dragged away from work to take a well earned break. One weekend, it was reported to me that after a relaxing day, he even tried his hand at singing karaoke but a colleague recalls that it did not quite have the X Factor.

In October 2008, Oggy was appointed to Navy Command Headquarters as the Deputy RFA Flotilla Safety Officer having expended a considerable amount of effort in achieving his qualification required for the Health & Safety position. He again demonstrated his commitment to it, spending a significant period of time studying at the Brunel University.

In the days running up to the funeral I was contacted by the Chief Engineer on RFA WAVE RULER in Charleston in the USA, RFA MOUNTS BAY operating in the South west approaches, and RFA FORT GEORGE in Devonport, the Cluster Support Teams at both Birkenhead and Falmouth and from colleagues throughout the RFA and they are unanimous in their regard and respect for Oggy, there is a common theme, he will be remembered within the Service as a good Shipmate and friend, hard working with an outstanding work ethic, professional and conscientious and always willing to lend a hand.

His passing is a sad loss to all and he will be sorely missed.

Gilbert Parsley
Captain (SE) RFA

RFA COMMUNITY WEBSITE

The Royal Fleet Auxiliary Community website www.rfacom.mod.uk is for RFA Personnel and their families and friends and offers a wide range of information on RFA matters. Connecting and supporting the RFA Community worldwide 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, this internet based Community Support facility is for all of us in the RFA community. If you are, or were, a member of the RFA, a family member or friend, this site is for you.

This service is not intended to replace or duplicate the Deployment News that units currently publish on their official pages of the RFA website www.rfa.mod.uk, which is aimed at a much wider audience, including the general public, potential recruits and journalists. The RFA Community website now has 1723 registered users up to and including April 2011.

The member's area is only accessible to personnel and their families who have registered to use this facility. This is a protected area and only information of an unclassified nature can be published and this strictly forbids the inclusion of information such as forthcoming port visits and other aspects of a ship's programme.

Current topics being discussed on the website include:

The Numbers Game
Upcoming RMT Ballot
New RFA 18
Healthy Eating
Voluntary Early Release Scheme (VERS- – RFA Personnel
Club Class Travel
Manpower

The following features are available only to those who have registered for an RFA Community Website account:

Crew Lists
Frequently Asked Questions
Emergency Contact Details
BFPO and UIN numbers
Liberty Boat routines
Appointers contact details
Promotion Notices
Gunline
Cascade Briefs

The site continues to expand as more and more individuals register for an account. To register for an account, follow the on-screen instructions at www.rfacom.mod.uk and ensure that you keep up to date!

SDSR and VfM Update - March 2011

In the last formal update on 3rd December 2010, details were provided on the outcomes of the SDSR and RFA Value for Money (VfM) reviews. In summary, the challenge was to '… reduce the overall RFA operating expenditure in direct proportion to the reduction of the number of hulls and in addition deliver 10% of efficiency savings…'

Since this date a number of key events have passed. On the 6 December a Parliamentary Adjournment Debate on the RFA took place in the House of Commons; this attracted unusually large cross-party support. On the 15th December, the Secretary of State for Defence, Dr Liam Fox, explained in more detail the force structure changes that would affect the Royal Navy's surface fleet. For the RFA the announcement confirmed the reduction of three RFA ships, RFA Bayleaf, Fort George and Largs Bay. In the early weeks of 2011, a greater understanding emerged over the number and grades of personnel the service would need to release from ship and shore appointments and the mechanisms and processes required to manage this downsizing.

This information was communicated to the work force on the 18th February. On the 28th the mainstream Civil Service scheme was formally announced; this introduced the concept of voluntary exit - referred to as 'VE' or 'VER' (voluntary early release) – a pre-redundancy mechanism. A detailed timeline accompanied this announcement. Finally, on 1st March, the Chief of the Defence Staff announced details of the forthcoming Armed Forces redundancy programme to non-RFA Service Personnel.

In meeting the SDSR and VfM challenge, work has had to dock in to the many and varied work streams being undertaken in the Department. At higher levels, management has had to understand the maturing defence planning assumptions and force structures contained within the 'Technical Instruction' along with initial thinking from the Defence Reform Review and implications of the Civil Service reductions. Shore post work will also have to take full account of the Navy Command and Maritime Transformation Reviews (NCR / MTR).

Work to date has concentrated on a number of areas that will need to underpin future deliberations and decisions. Key amongst these have been a greater understanding of the new post SDSR cost baseline; ship schemes of complement (SoC); ship watch and station bills (WSB); shore footprint; fuel and port costs; benchmarking and the vital manpower release mechanisms and processes. Review of maintenance costs has also continued albeit this is largely driven by the outcomes of the DE&S MTR.

Now that some of the earlier work has concluded, it is proposed that a working group is convened between the RFA and MTUs to explore some areas in more detail. In the first instance this is likely to include 'introduction of new tailored SoC', new 'harbour emergency organisation', new WSB and proposals for a new 'rota appointing pilot scheme'.

Whilst the RFA Service continues to operate in difficult and uncertain times, we are clear on the mandated challenge set before us and our future as a balanced, resilient and esteemed service. Over the next few months we face the uncomfortable task of releasing a significant number of our highly trained, motivated and committed workforce. For some the prospect of VERS may seem an opportunity but for the majority it will be understandably unsettling; we will thus look to undertake this in a smooth and transparent process. Human tendency is to focus on the negatives but we should be mindful that, whilst the Government and Royal Navy requires a global maritime influence, so it will require the RFA – strong in both its assured delivery, reputation and cost effectiveness. The MTU partnership agreement will help achieve this shared outcome.

CAPTAIN (E) CHRIS SMITH'S RETIREMENT PRESENTATION

Finally after almost two years since his departure, the presentation of an engraved decanter and tumblers was made to Captain (E) Chris Smith to commemorate his long association with Fort George. Whilst Chris left the ship in late 2008 it was not known at the time he would go on to retire and as a result it had not been possible to suitably recognise his long career. So the opportunity was therefore taken to invite him back to the ship during the ship's visit to her affiliated city of South Shields.

Chris and his wife Delia with members of the Officers Mess and partners at the informal ceremony

On the evening, because of the weather conditions, noticeably the terrible snow, the decanter set had been delayed in transit. As a substitute on the evening of the presentation, an engraved Fort George tankard was presented to Chris. The weather having since improved the engraved decanter set has arrived in the ship and been delivered to Chris who is reported to have been delighted with the gift.

RATING TO OFFICER SCHEME NEW RANK INSIGNIA

The rank insignia worn by trainees on the (X) and (E) Rating to Officer (RTO) Scheme is the same insignia as the Degree Cadet (X) & (E). As from the 20 June 2011, the RTOs attending the RFA BRNC Course, will be the first to wear the new style insignia. The individual will wear the rank of a Third Officer, accompanied by a 'white flash' worn at the outer edge of the shoulder slide, to denote 'Under Training'. The No1 Blue Uniform and No2 Mess Undress, will bear the insignia of a Third Officer on the sleeve, and have a white shoulder flash at the top of the sleeve on each arm.

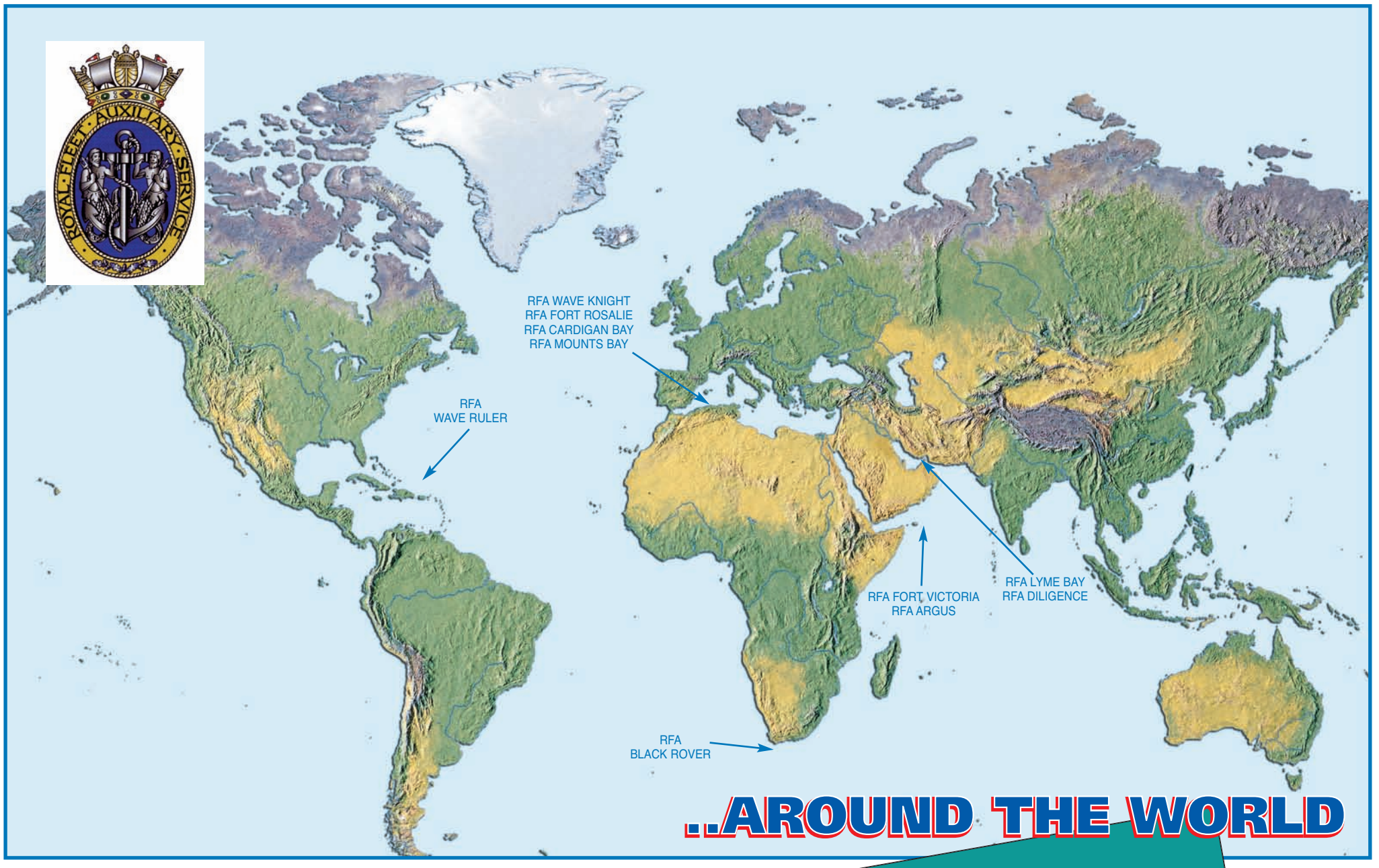
In future, the RTO's are to be addressed or introduced as 'Mr / Miss / Mrs' and NEVER as 'RTO'. On paper they will be identified as Third Officer (UT) (X) or (E), denoting Under Training. They will remain on the same Pay Scale as they joined the RTO Scheme, until they have qualified by officially passing their MCA Oral Examinations. The scheme they are on will still be called the 'Rating to Officer Scheme'.

Mailing List

With GUNLINE now available in electronic format on the RFA page on the www.royalnavy.mod.uk website and the RF A Community website www.rncom.mod.uk there is now the opportunity to reduce the amount of unwanted mail. If you would like to read GUNLINE on line and stop receiving it in the post please e.mail me at mark.mundy307@mod.uk.

ONLINE DISCOUNTS FOR SERVING AND EX-SERVING ROYAL FLEET AUXILLARY PERSONNEL

It's free, easy to use and can save you lots of money!
The Official Discount/Benefit Scheme for all serving and ex-serving RFA personnel can be found at - www.forcesdiscounts-mod.co.uk
This is an ideal first port of c all for any service families looking for discounts, savings and special offers on a range of pu rchases!
There ARE OVER 1400 COMPANIES OFFERING THOUSANDS of DISCOUNTS online now!
A further bonus of this scheme is that immediate family members of serving personnel are also entitled to sign up and start tak ing advantage of the discounts in their own right. Once you have registered on the website you will be given the option of receiving a free newsletter. This will enable you to enter competitions which are run regularly, giving you the chance to win fantastic prizes. You will also receive advance news of new discounts and any free offers available on a 'first come first served basis'.
If you have any suggestions about ways in which the scheme could be improved, or if you know of companies either nationally or locally that offer discounts but don't appear on th e website, please use the feedback facility available on the homepage of the website.
Currently the website has over 144,000 members so there are lots of you out there who have not yet accessed the benefits you are entitled to!
So why not join up now (th ere's no time like the present) and see how much money you can save?



WAVE KNIGHT
Deployed as part of COUGAR 11 RFTG enroute to the Mediterranean from the UK.

WAVE RULER
Conducting duties as APT(N) in support of allied nations assets in the Caribbean.

GOLD ROVER
Preparing for FOST serials post refit.

BLACK ROVER
Conducting APT(S) duties, currently in South Africa undertaking fleet time maintenance.

BAYLEAF
Alongside in Portsmouth undergoing pre disposal preparations.

ORANGELEAF
FOST tanker duties in support of operational training.

FORT VICTORIA
Deployed east of Suez in support of National Operations undertaking AGRT taskings.

FORT AUSTIN
Alongside in Portsmouth, due to move to Birkenhead in May.

FORT ROSALIE
Deployed as part of COUGAR 11 RFTG enroute to the Mediterranean from the UK.

CARDIGAN BAY
Deployed as part of COUGAR 11 RFTG currently in the Mediterranean.

MOUNTS BAY
Deployed as part of COUGAR 11 RFTG enroute to the Mediterranean from the UK.

LYME BAY
Running in support of the coalition as part of OP TELIC tasking.

ARGUS
Deployed East of Suez in support of national tasking.

DILIGENCE
In the Gulf continuing in support of coalition assets.

Provided courtesy of The U.K. Hydrographic Office

RFA Fort George Raises Funds for Merchant Seamen's War Memorial Society

Photograph of presentation of cheque.
L-R: Harry Bygate (trustee), Paula Mason (trustee), Brian Armstrong, Frank Welsh (trustee) and Ken Turner (trustee)

Prior to the de-commissioning of RFA Fort George the crew held a fund raising auction in the Crew Bar. The event raised £210.20 to be donated to the Merchant Seamen's War Memorial Society (MSWMS), widely known as Springbok. The Society operates from a 200 acre estate in beautiful Surrey countryside and provides accommodation, with a variety of levels of support, for retired seafarers. It also provides a superb location and facilities for holidays. This is not the first time that the crew of RFA Fort George has supported the Society and the Chief Executive, Trevor Goacher said that he was delighted with the continued support of the crew and thanked them for this generous donation. Following a recent event at Springbok Steward Paula Mason, who is a trustee of the Society, and Motor Man 1 Brian Armstrong, from the ship, presented a cheque to some of the trustees of the charity. Paula and Brian have promoted awareness of the Society and supported its fund raising activities for some time. Their contribution and that of their shipmates is very much appreciated.

RAFTING AND GRAFTING

While the UK was hit by freezing temperatures and mountains of snow in early December, RFA DILIGENCE was basking in the welcome warmth of the Arabian winter. After an autumn of mixed tasking supporting other units and working with several other countries' navies, DILIGENCE met up with HMS CORNWALL for a day in the calm waters of the Gulf of Oman.

The day dawned in the usual manner, bright and warm with a slight haze and almost no wind – perfect for the rafting up evolution about to be undertaken. Rafting up is a delicate process that would make full use of the unique manoeuvrability of DILIGENCE and the seamanship skills of both ships companies.

DILIGENCE is equipped with a dynamic positioning (DP) system – a highly complex computer suite that uses the vessels two huge bow thrusters, two azimuth thrusters and her controllable pitch propeller to drive the ship in any direction, forwards, backwards or sideways with extreme precision. The system can even make the ship spin on a sixpence or 'hover' motionless in the water with accuracy of up to 0.5m, in winds of up to a Force 5. It is a capability that no other ship in the RFA or RN has and one that has earned DILIGENCE her good reputation through the years of being able to go anywhere, in any conditions and support any other unit.

The DP system is controlled by a joystick mounted on a control panel that is movable – just like a big playstation controller. It is plugged in and has a long wandering lead so it can be used on the bridge or outside on either bridge wing. For the raft up with CORNWALL the Navigating Officer was driving with the joystick on the starboard bridge wing where he could best monitor CORNWALL's set and drift and gauge the distance and closing speed of his approach. Passing astern of CORNWALL first to get an idea of her drift rate, DILIGENCE then stopped parallel to her and with Navs tweaking the controls as he went, we moved sideways with the large rubber fenders out and into position alongside CORNWALL, our bridge wing towering over hers. Lines and wires were passed between the ships and tightened to prevent her from moving.

Once secured DILIGENCE showed off her capabilities by side-towing CORNWALL for a couple of miles before letting the DP system hold the ship motionless in the water for the remainder of the day. The rest of the day saw DILIGENCE offer up her extensive workshops, and support facilities including giving CORNWALL fuel and fresh water and receiving some sullage to our slop tanks. CORNWALL's embarked Royal Marines boarding team also found an opportunity to practice operating on an unfamiliar platform, searching areas and exercising with our RN force protection team from 'P' Squadron.

The warm evening soon drew in and after a much needed evening meal both ships companies said their final goodbyes before departing under cover of darkness into another still and peaceful Arabian night.

By CR1 Dave Clarkson & CR2 Jason Smith

0800 121 4765

www.seafarersupport.org

Seafarer SUPPORT

Seafarer Support, a confidential **Freephone** service (operated by the Merchant Navy W elfare Board,) has successfully assisted over 600 Seafarers or their families with welfare enquiries, since its launch in 2009.

The referral service, much like directory enquiries, puts callers in touch with organisation(s) that can provide specialist support and guidance.

With over 100 maritime charities offering assistance, knowing where to start can be challenging, so let Seafarer Support do the hard work for you!

Sally, our Welfare Officer, is on hand to answer your queries, so why not give her a call on: 0800 121 4765 or visit: www.seafarersupport.org to see how Seafarer Support can help you.

Morris McGee Says A Fond Farewell

Having now retired I would like to say a big thank you to everyone I have sailed with over the years and especially the personnel on my last trip on Diligence .The RFA has given me lots of happy memories and many of these were only made possible by the attitude that those in the service have to seafaring life.

I have seen many changes to our way of life, but there has been and always will be more good times than bad times.

I shall miss the company, but not too much as I will be busy on the golf course and in our garden.

Long may the R.F.A. continue to serve our armed forces.

Morris.

The 2010 Royal Fleet Auxiliary Flotilla Attitude Survey

You may recall that an independent Flotilla Attitude Survey (FAS) was conducted in the latter part of 2010 - this survey is a key way of finding out what you think about life in the RFA.

If you completed and returned the questionnaire – thank you!
Your feedback is a valuable source of information for your senior management.

What did you have to say?

Overall, the draft results indicated that the majority of people surveyed have a broadly positive view towards life in the RFA.

There are a significant number of positive aspects to RFA life:

- People (81%) feel **a very strong sense of belonging** to the RFA and 68% want to stay with the RFA until the end of their career or for as long as they can.
- A good majority understand the traditions and values (78%), a**re proud to be part of the RFA** (63%) and are motivated to do their best for the service (57%). Half would recommend joining the RFA to friends and family.
- The **wider value of the RFA is well recognised,** the vast majority (79%) agree that the RFA provides an important service to our country.
- People are **satisfied with their jobs** in general (65%), and feel a good sense of achievement (58%), challenge (60%) and variety (60%) in their roles.
- The majority are satisfied with their **basic rate of pay** (53%), **pension benefits** (63%) and their overall leave entitlement (50%). Satisfaction with basic pay is 5% above the industry average.
- **Satisfaction with immediate superiors is high** - 70% are satisfied that their immediate superiors support them in their job. The vast majority feel their efforts are recognised, interests understood/represented, that their immediate superiors set a positive example, encourage them to develop their skills and are supportive over work/life balance issues.
- Our people understand (80%) and support (62%) the **need for change**.
- Our people (61%) feel well informed about the RFA, with cascade briefs and Gunline both scoring highly as a well-used sources of information.

There are, however, a number of areas where findings are less positive:

- A significant minority (33%) report that their own **morale** to be low; almost equal to the proportion (36%) whose morale is high.
- Significantly more people perceive morale across the RFA to be low (63%).
- Many of our people (42%) do not feel **valued** in the RFA; compared to a minority (28%) who do feel valued.
- People feel that **change** in the RFA is not well managed (48%) and that the reasons for change are not communicated effectively (43%).
- Confidence in **senior officers ashore** is low, with only 18% believing that senior officers ashore understand and represent their interests.
- People (53%) feel dissatisfied with the fairness of the **promotion system**.
- Sense of belonging to the **RN** (51%) and **MOD** (31%) are weak with significant numbers disagreeing with these statements (49% & 69% respectively).

Comment from COMRFA

The Flotilla Attitude Survey (FAS) is one of the key ways that we, your senior representatives ashore, are equipped to find out about your views, so I would first like to thank all of you who took the time to complete it.

The draft findings were presented to the RFA Management Board earlier this month and, despite the timing of this survey against the backdrop of a Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR) and HM Treasury's Value for Money (VfM) Review, we were heartened by the number of positive aspects. I was particularly gratified to see that so many of you understand our traditions and values, have such a strong sense of belonging and wish to fulfil your careers within the RFA. I was further encouraged by the strong recognition of the importance of the RFA's role in serving our country and the understanding of, and support for, the need for change - this will be key in the months and years to come.

The FAS, however, also indicates some significant areas of dissatisfaction surrounding morale; feeling valued; implementing, and communicating reasons for, change; confidence in senior officers ashore, fairness in the promotion system and use of the grapevine as a source of information. I am also interested by the disparity of responses across the ranks and intend to investigate this further. I will shortly produce an action plan to indicate the areas that we intend to address at this stage and I will, of course, keep you informed of our intentions and progress.

Finally, although 2010 was the first time that an RFA attitude survey had been carried out for a number of years; it is my intention that this will now become a bi-annual process. This will enable us to track the affect our actions, and change in general, have upon the organisation. I would therefore urge you all to take the time to complete surveys in the future and keep us informed of your views about life in the RFA.

What next?

The full results of the 2010 survey will be distributed to ships once the final report is received.

The Strategy and Transition team are now tasked taking this work forward, recommending the areas to be addressed, the actions that are required and the timescales in which these will be delivered. The action plan will be proposed and presented to the Management Board in May.

Finally

Your views really do matter! Please take the time to complete the future surveys and contribute to the RFA of the future.

COSCAP's Departing Line on the work of the RFA

Major General Garry Robison the former Chief of Staff Capability in Navy Command and COMRFA's Line Manager, in his speech to mark the end of his appointment said, "If I've learned anything here it is the critical importance of the RFA and what they do to enable maritime activity and war fighting. There are many who still do not see this, from Ministers down, and there remain battles ahead on fundamental issues such as the MARS tanker programme, the RFA's Value for Money and our essential need for LSDAs to support contingent operations and our use of RFA platforms on tasks more usually undertaken by white ensign warships. Time and again we see the utility of RFA platforms in support of maritime operations and yet we continue to have to defend and fight their corner. I pay tribute to the RFA.

Sudoku by Chris White

Answers on page 16

			5			1	3	
			9			8		4
				4		5		
3		1					7	
	9	6				3	2	
	7					4		1
		9		2				
6		2			8			
	8	3			1			

RFA ASSOCIATION

Chairman's Dit

"Shake shake shake the ketchup bottle. First non'l come and then a lott'l". Attributed to Ogden Nash but actually penned by Richard Willard Armour (1906 – 1989). This couplet describes exactly the production of our two pages in Gunline from two perspectives.

Firstly, getting copy in from the Branches or members and secondly putting something together and writing my dit. So coupling that to this edition, in the case of external copy none did come and then an awful lot did, and my ramblings, well the muse was not upon me but ever onwards, time, tide and Gunline editorial dates wait for no man.

As I write this we are only six weeks away from the 2011 Nottingham Reunion. Bit of a quandary here because by the time Gunline hits the street it will probably be past the closing date for booking but do you want to miss our annual 'red carpet' event? As ever the Commodore will be there to give us his 'State of the Nation Address' and after all the trials and tribulations of the last year it should prove to be very interesting. As you will have seen in the calling notice we hope to run a trip to Alrewas, the site of the RFA National Memorial (providing we can get a bus-full).

Talking about the Commodore, I had my annual meeting with him very recently. Lots of things were talked about not least the RFA Memorial and the funding required, the James Coull Memorial Award, future financing of the RFAA and the RFAA after 2012 (when I intend to stand down). This will all be covered in my Annual Report which should be available on the website soon and will be presented at the AGM.

You may remember Surgeon Griff Roberts whose death I reported in the December Gunline. His daughter Mrs Sue Duce has kindly contributed his uniforms and some photographs and memorabilia to the Archive and I reproduce one of them here. It shows a group picture of the officers of RFA Olmeda (arguably my most favourite RFA) on the Monkey Island. I can name quite a few, how about you. It's names that bring pictures of people to life, drop me an email if you can help.

Ho-Hum! Struggling now chaps and chapesses and 'is that a deadline which I see before me', quoted from the 'Scottish Play', current word count 398 and still not enough.

Ah yes, member Roger Davis achieved his long held ambition, at the tender age of 93 to visit the Falklands and sail around Cape Horn. Hearty congratulations Roger, a lesser man would not have taken on such a challenge. The picture shows Roger at the RFA Memorial at Fitzroy as he remembers his old Friend, the late Captain Robin Green.

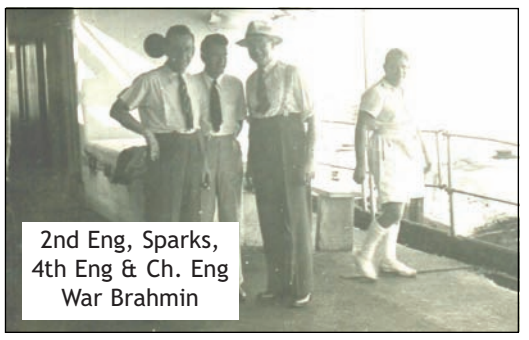
And finally, and as ever, my thanks to all the

contributors to this edition of Gunline. John Littlechild, your article has finally made it, Mike Day on RFA Ship Model collecting and of course Ian Hawkes for his Tales of the War Brahmin and associated photographs. John Roddis has submitted a very long and learned treatise on the evolution of Landing Ships but some pruning is required before it can grace these pages. Can you contribute to Gunline, it ís not hard and everybody has a tale to tell. So come on Chaps and Chapesses, break out the Basildon Bond and put pen to paper, photographs are always welcome to illustrate and give it a go remembering, of course that your Grannie might read it so please leave the saucy stuff to the News of the World.

P.S. See you in Nottingham.

FURTHER MEMORIES: RFA War Brahmin 1943

A few years ago, out of the blue, I received an e-mail from a lady saying she had seen me mention the RFA War Brahmin in one of my requests for crew information on the MN site. It turned out that she was the daughter of the Radio Officer James Albert Taylor on the RFA War



2nd Eng, Sparks, 4th Eng & Ch. Eng War Brahmin

Brahmin who had joined her a few weeks before I had, and she was about to visit Bermuda where the Brahmin was stationed to see her Fathers grave. The following is a copy of an E-mail she sent me.

"The Everest Hotel mentioned was owned by some friend I made in Bermuda and I used to spent many off duty hours with them, they had just lost their eldest son in the RAF, a pilot. Hi Ian, yes, I'm the daughter and my name is Dale. It happens all the time that people link that name with a fella! Yes, that's my father and how lovely you have all these "action" shots on board. You look like a fine young officer. I will look out a different picture of him when he was younger, taken in Canada by a lady called Winny (Winifred) who he remained friends with all his life and also of his grave - will send these tomorrow as we're off out today.We will certainly look for the Everest Hotel and if it's not there, we'll try and find out what happened to it. My dad signed on for the Brahmin on 12.10.42 only a month after he got married to my mother in Aberdeen, but didn't arrive in Bermuda until 14.11.42 (date on passport) and discharged on 11.10.44, Hamilton and arrived in Belfast on 21.10.44 (not sure how he got to Bermuda or how he came back). It never occurred to me that he didn't actually go and return on the Brahmin itself, so with your information, it looks like he went via the States first as there is a permit for one journey only. You asked when he died, he was on the Empire Test and was taken ill (pneumoccoccal meningitis) on board, and was rushed to the closest port which was Bermuda, landed on the 8/4/1952 and died on the 9/4/1952 at King Edward Hospital, his funeral went from St Teresa's to the Calvary cemetery, Robert Avenue, Hamilton. The grave has been tended by the Guild of the Holy Compassion and we are in touch with them and they sent the photo of the grave. Will send you another once I have the plaque attached. We will be staying at the Salt Kettle hotel, overlooking Hamilton harbour. We

Ian outside the Everest Hotel

would love to meet you and listen to your tales of your seafaring days and of course it would be wonderful to meet someone outside the family who actually knew my father. Will be in touch.Dale."

We did meet up as Dale and her husband came down and spent the day with me in Thundersley looking at my photos. We keep in touch and hope to meet up again in 2011. It ís a small world.

Ian Hawks

LONDON BRANCH CHRISTMAS LUNCHEON

From L-R: Richard Fernley, Gillian Downham, Martyn Hobbs, Tom Adams, John Caruana, Sylvia Hobbs, Bob Nichols, Derek Pevier

OBITUARIES

Since the last edition of Gunline the following members and ex-RFA non members have sadly "Crossed the Bar"

Peter Riddick Writer 24 Nov 2009 aged 84

Captain(E) Colin Johnson 2 Jan 2010 aged 70

Captain(E) Ken Robinson 31 Dec 2010 aged 83

Paul Andrews Purser Jan 2011 aged 63

Chief Officer(E) Mike Kitchen 14 Jan 2011 aged 60

Commodore(E) Ken Lacy 17 Jan 2011 aged 77

First Officer(SE) August (Oggy) Biadacz 3 Feb 2011 aged 57

Geoff Williams ASTO(N) 3 Feb 2011 aged 61

Louis Grima Deck Storekeeper 1 Mar 2011 aged 81

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www.rfaa-london.org.uk/

FOR SERVICE, SEAFARERS AND FAMILIES

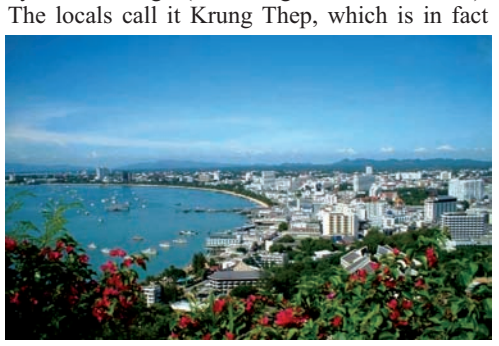
REG CHARITY NO. 1093950. PATRON: HRH THE EARL OF WESSEX, KG KCVO ADC REGISTERED IN SCOTLAND No. SC039054

MUSES FROM THE FAR-FLUNG:-

BANGKOK - THE BIG MANGO

Although it has to be said that Bangkok was not normally on the regular RFA runs in the Far East, since it has since become my adopted home, I thought it worth a mention, particularly when the subject of change is under review.

To begin with of course, Bangkok is the city name by which it is most commonly referred to by the "Ferang" (i.e. foreigner, auslander etc). The locals call it Krung Thep, which is in fact



short for "Krung Thep Mahanakhon Amon Rattanakosin Mahinthara Yuthaya Mahadilok Phop Nopparat Ratchatani Bunrom Udomratchaniwet Mahasathan Amon Phiman Awatan Sathit Sakkathattiya Witsanukam Prasit" - BKK for short, and our Welsh cousins think they have the longest place name in the world!

For many years it was my contention that today's Bangkok was Singapore thirty years ago, and to be sure there still remain quite a number of similarities. The city is rapidly modernising, but not at such a furious pace as Singas. Present day Bangkok is as famous for its traffic jams, its pollution, and its driving style as it's notorious night life - all fully "in your face" and not having to be sought out as it is in most other cities. Although having said that, it is just as easy to avoid if you dont care for that sort of thing, so I have little sympathy with folks who complain about it. I was once asked by a first tripper just arriving at Don Muang airport, on which side of the road they drove in Thailand. My reply was of course, that the locals drive on any side they can get - it is as true today as it was then. To say that you have to have eyes in the back of your head is to say the least of it, and many of the old adages ring very true - treat all other drivers as idiots (because usually they are) - expect the unexpected (and then some). Only yesterday, on a four lane expressway, in front of me, a pickup was wandering in and out of the fast lane. Suddenly and without any warning he decided he would take the left hand exit he was virtually past. Unable to move accross the three inner lanes because of cars whizzing past on the inside

- he stopped!!!! And then moved directly accross the three lanes regardless of fast moving traffic scattering in all directions. This sort of thing does not happen in Singapore, believe me, but is greeted here with a casual shrug of the shoulders.

Previous visitors will be glad to know that the "Bangkok Hole Company" is still very much in business, and the pavements and walkways in particular are still dotted with "Pension Traps", dirty great holes to trip the unwary or unobservant. The thoughtfully provided ramps, intended for the disabled are invaluable to motor cyclists driving on the pavement, but since the pavements are usually not navigable for pedestrians, due to the hawkers stalls, and floggers of counterfeit watches, one usually has to walk in the road anyway, and risk being bowled over by a bus which disappears in a great cloud of blackers!

Officially, most bars and restaurants are non smoking, although if there are ash trays on the tables it's a moot point. Some establishments make you sit outside to smoke, where you are of course rapidly gassed by the passing traffic.

The infamous Patpong area is still going strong, hundred of girlie bars, massage parlours etc. Right in the middle of Patpong, a supermarket called Foodland, where I always used to shop. Nothing like emerging from a Supermarket at 11 a.m, loaded down with plastic bags of goodies, only to be stopped and asked if I would like a massage!!!! And my favourite, the Patpong bar which advertises "Over One Hundred Beautiful Girls - and some ugly ones too!" Bobby's Arms, a well known British style Pub still clings on after thirty-odd years, but the Toby Jug disappeared, never to return, now replaced by a large number of Irish style pubs throughout the metropolis.

Thailand is still the tops for scran of any description. The hawkers stalls are still very popular, cheap and of good quality just as they were in Singapore , just ignore the rats! It is very very rare to get a bad, or even indifferent meal anywhere in the country. Pattaya in particular is blessed with the full range of foreign and domestic cuisine at bargain prices (Until you start on the booze that is).

Finally, a word about the recent political problems. It was well publicized where these incidents were taking place, so anyone who got caught up in them, for the most part, it was their own fault. Very easy to avoid those areas - I did, even though my favourite watering hole was right in the middle of it all, just used another one instead. Things are pretty much back to normal now, although the State of Emergency is still in place in Bangkok and a few other provinces. This does not mean a curfew, just that gatherings of more then five people are not allowed, and that the police have extra powers to detain suspected trouble-makers. I have to say that in my opinion the coverage of the troubles by both BBC and CNN was biased and not properly researched - that is the opinion of one who lives here all the time, so if any prospective visitors have been deterred by these reports, take it with a pinch of salt. The latest advertising for Thailand - "Amazing Thailand, just how you remember it!" Well, that rather depends on who you are, and when you were last here, now, doesn't it! But you get used to things, last time I was in the UK, I sat in a petrol station for about twenty minutes, waiting for service. One rarely has a parking problem, since the majority of the buildings are new, and have underground car parks, which are relatively inexpensive, unlike the UK .All in all, there are a lot of worse places to live, come and visit some time, there are quite a lot of us already here!

John Littlechild
First Officer (Supply) Retired.
Bangkok 17th August 2010

Collecting RFA Ships in miniature!

I'm sure many of you will be aware that there is quite an international market in the collecting of models of liners, cruise ships and indeed warships of today and, as they say, yesteryear. It has not been so popular in the UK, which is surprising bearing in mind our island status and the large number of people who had careers at sea, both Royal and Merchant Navy. Companies making these models were prolific in Germany, Austria, America and Japan.

I was first exposed to this culture as a lad, in land-locked Taunton, shortly after I became

RFA Celerol & sister 02

interested in ships at the age of 10. For a Christmas present my parents bought me a collection of Triang model ships and a layout with a harbour. They were being sold off cheaply by a local upmarket toyshop because the venture had not been a great success. Lucky me. Whereas Dinky Toys, Corgis and Matchbox toys were the thing, Triang's Minic ships were not! I was very happy with the gift, although bemused that the RN ships were painted blue, not grey. The QUEEN MARY and QUEEN ELIZABETH were magnificent, as indeed were the other liners and cruise ships. I added to the collection with plastic 'Eagle' series kits of model warships of the same scale and they were painted in their correct colours. I also made scale models using balsa wood and steel pins for gun barrels. We were still quite inventive in those days. Inevitably, in later life, the whole collection was disposed off without much thought. After being ashore for 12 or so years and really missing the life I gave up so easily, I was browsing on EBay one day and came across a 1200 scale Triang model of RMS AQUITANIA up for auction. I was amazed it was still available, second hand but in mint condition, so I put in a bid and 'won' it. Then I discovered 1250 scale models of RN ships were also available on EBay, mainly from German dealers. Oh dear. The bug had bitten, and I was hooked. The real surprise happened when a model of an RFA came up. It was of a World War 1 ship called RFA BIRCHOL, of the CREOSOL class. I had to have a go and made a bid for it; it was mine for a very reasonable amount of euros. Now the game was on. There are two main scales for the collector of real miniatures. 1200:1, one inch = 100 foot, which is a British scale. 1250 scale is that of Europe and the rest of the world, but I have yet to find the logic of it.

There were many metal modelmakers in UK in the post war years, which probably encouraged Triang to take the plunge in the 50ís. Names like Oceanic, Fleetline, Eneris and Sirene. Some of the models produced were grotesque, others merely disappointing. One or two emerge as very good but the best were made by firms on the continent, as with the manufacturers of BIRCHOL, the German firm of Navis. They have and still do make excellent models of warships from the principal nations but BIRCHOL[1] is their only RFA. The Austrian firm of Trident have made excellent models of the OLMEDA class tankers after modernisation for the SeaKing, and a nice model of ENGADINE. Another German company, Albatross have quite a few RFA's in their catalogue, from FORT AUSTIN to RFA LARGS BAY and HARTLAND POINT. However, the finest model ever of FORT GRANGE was made by a Brit, Sean Pritchard of SeaVee models. The quality of his casting and finish is second to none. I did not discover his company until after he had issued FORT GRANGE. I came across one for sale second hand. After I bought it at a price I daren't mention, I contacted him to compliment him on the quality of the model. My cabin portholes were accurately placed – that is the amount of his detail. He replied to me and asked where I had got the model as it was rare for them to come on the market. It appears that he only makes a couple of dozen or so from a cast then the mould is trashed. I have since bought his RFA DILIGENCE. They have a real quality and like all the other models, they have proved a good investment.

My favourite models are those of the older ships. Can you imagine being able to have models of the FRANCOL, CREOSOL or APPLELEAF [1] from World War One? Amazing really. One dealer with whom I regularly trade offered me a model of RELIANT at a very reasonable price. So I sent off the money post haste, and was gobsmacked when the model arrived, in pristine condition, of RELIANT[1]. It was manufactured by Oceanic and is extremely rare. I have a model of RELIANT[2] also by Oceanic, and the casting quality is poor and the

ALK 310a RFA Fort George (1)

scale even poorer. I don't know why continental manufacturers are so much better with their casting. Only Sean's SeaVee ships are the exception. His methodology and short runs of production ensure a first class quality. The prices are sensible and the value guaranteed to rise because serious collectors recognise the quality.

Some modelmakers prefer to cast in plastic or resin. One or two have produced RFA ships, mainly of the World War 2 era. It is more difficult to identify the manufacturer as they are often unmarked, with possibly only the name of the ship inked in on the base. Colin Staag and Len Jordan are famous British manufacturers in plastic and resin. Santa Rosa and Convoy are the model trade names.Another British company that produces RFAs is Skytrex. They also seem to sell their models under the Triton on the continent. To my eye, they lack consistency of scale and finesse in moulding. Bows are blunt, masts over-heavy, RAS rigs cumbersome; they are representations rather than scaled miniatures. Who would have thought that, for instance, when there are only two known photos of RFA INDUSTRY, that it is possible to obtain a metal cast scale model of the ship? Also one of the PET class oil and water carriers, the WAR Class tankers including the WAR KRISHNA, the engines aft version of the class made in metal as a scale model by 2 manufacturers.

I have at least 4 different versions of the Ranger class in miniature of varying degrees of quality in metal; and a remarkably detailed resin one complete with RAS rig and hose. I think the resin one was made by Santa Rosa, who make an excellent model of DINGLEDALE in full war outfit, a very fine model. The English makers do better with resin moulding than metal casting.This is just an introduction into very satisfying hobby in a very specialist area. There are a number of websites which can be very helpful. If you live in East Anglia Tim Hudson has a very good website and hosts an excellent model ship fair twice a year. [http://www.photrek.co.uk/miniships.html]. Anoher good dealer is Martin Brown who attends the Theale Model ship fair in Hampshire. His website is http://waterline-ships.co.uk/. He is a very good source of second hand models as well as new ones. I have lost count of the models of RFAs that I have. One of the RFAs of which little is factually known is RUTHENIA. Previously she had has been SS LAKE CHAMPLAIN, and I recently got an excellent model of the ship to add to the miniature RFA Fleet. Who knows one day I may get the RUTHENIA. Good collecting.

Mike Day

The Marine Society is a one-stop shop for maritime professionals

No organization has more experience of delivering learning at sea.

The Marine Society provides a range of well-managed services exclusively to seafarers to enhance learning and well being, and to facilitate professional development.

The London-based charity has encouraged, enabled and educated many generations of RFA personnel and is a recommended first point of contact for all matters relating to personal and professional progression.

The Society works with a range of mainstream education and training providers to deliver opportunities for personal and professional development that are seafarer-friendly and focused on the needs of the individual in the context of the maritime sector.

It caters for all levels of learning, and accommodates all ages, abilities and aspirations. So whether you simply wish to improve those GCSE grades from school or whether you're a senior officer seeking civilian recognized qualifications in preparation for coming ashore, The Marine Society will have something to offer.

GCSE/A Level

A reminder to all who need to improve their GCSE and/or A Level grade that the Marine Society ought to be your first choice to provide first class tutor-supported study programmes.

The society will help you achieve the best possible examination result in the shortest possible time. As youíd expect, there is full support for email and telephone, and all staff are familiar with your commitments with the RFA.

For those returning to learning after a period away, there are courses in functional skills designed to brush up on the basics. These are ideal for those seeking promotion and who require a grounding in modern maths as part of their knowledge base.

Examination Centre

The Marine Society is an examination centre for all the main examination boards at GCSE and A Level.

For many years it has been entering seafarers for exams, irrespective of whether they have taken advantage of the Societyís excellent tutor-supported self-study programmes.

But from this summer itís opening its doors as an examination centre to everyone on a first come, first served basis. Naturally seafarers will get priority. After them will be the spouses and families of seafarers.

So if you know of anyone who wishes to be entered, contact the Marine Society **education@ms-sc.org**

Facebook

The Marine Society has embraced social media. It now has a Facebook page and we hope *Gunline* readers will pop by and take a look at **www.facebook.com/marinesociety**

Marine Society director Brian Thomas told this paper:

"We aim to feed the page with news and chatter about the many opportunities we provide in support of those who go to sea, and to raise awareness of the many excellent career opportunities which exist in the wider maritime sector."

There is also a discussion forum and notes page attached, and it's hoped this present an opportunity to share best practice and generally engage the audience.

Brian went:

"There are over 600 million active Facebook users worldwide: a truly enormous reach, and it's a portal no longer the preserve of the young. Weíd be crazy to ignore it."

Many seafarers regularly use Facebook and itís this fact that persuaded the oldest seafarersí charity in the world to embrace contemporary cutting edge technology to do what it is does best: support those at sea and who aspire to go to sea.

Do visit the Marine Societyís Facebook page and, if you like it, please say so and recommend it to others!

Advice

Advice on all matters of concern to RFA seafarers is free, independent and confidential.

Last year the Marine Society dealt with 6,500 queries from maritime professionals. 39% of those were about issues related to continuing professional development with a view to coming ashore.

The Marine Society remains the only maritime sector organisation to hold the coveted Matrix Standard - the national quality standard for any organisation that delivers information, advice and/or guidance on learning and work.

Thomas Gray Memorial Prize

Nominations are being sought for the Marine Society's Thomas Gray Silver Medal for this year.

The Thomas Gray Memorial Trust was established in 1925 in memory of Thomas Gray, a Senior Surveyor for the Board of Trade, who was particularly concerned with improving the professionalism of seafarers in the latter half of the 19th Century.

The award is in recognition of exceptional deeds of merit at sea and includes services to seafarers in the broadest sense. These deeds may be related to any aspect of seafaring, including saving of lives, the well being of seafarers and any exceptional deeds related to the business of seafaring.

Last years' Silver Medal was awarded to Richard Woodman for a lifetime's scholarship and contribution to the better public understanding of the role and importance of the Merchant Navy to the development of the UK and its maritime heritage.

Previous winners include Paul Savage of the RNLI in recognition of his work on the design and development of first aid training for lifeboat crews, and the year before that the recipient was Alex Thompson, a yachtsman who went to the aid of a fellow competitor in the Velux 5 Oceans Race. Other years it has been awarded for acts of exceptional bravery at sea or exemplary acts of seamanship. The spectrum of eligibility is quite broad?

Cut-off date to receive nominations for this year's medal is **30 May 2011**.

It would be good to have a recipient from the RFA. Please contact the Marine Society or visit their website for more information.

Course Sponsorship Packages

The Marine Society has changed the way it deals with seafarers who wish to pursue courses with The Open University and its bespoke programmes in conjunction with the Institute of Work Based Learning at Middlesex University.

Instead of referring prospective learners onto the organisation (after giving them appropriate advice), it now offers to sponsor them. This means the seafarer pays course fees directly to the Marine Society and the staff there sort all the paperwork and interface with the organisation on the seafarers' behalf.

That arrangement can continue for the duration of the seafarers' studies, thereby allowing him/her to focus on the studies rather than bureaucracy associated with the programme provider.

Moreover, this added value service can work out cheaper as well as considerably more convenient for the seafarer. This is because the fee quoted by the Marine Society includes a reduction on the fees publicly quoted by the provider. The difference represents the element the Marine Society contributes as a subsidy, which it prefers to call a scholarship.

This arrangement allows staff at the Marine Society to more effectively intercede on the seafarer's behalf in the event of a problem with submitting assignments or undertaking assessments. It also allows better progress monitoring and so can step in if at any time assistance is required. Of course the Marine Society will supply any books if requested. In the event a course has elements requiring sustained access to the internet, it can also provide DVD work-rounds as required.

The Marine Society's Brian Thomas told *Gunline*: 'Feedback received from seafarer beneficiaries rate this new added value service highly. It's taking to the next level what we do best: supporting seafarers and incentivising them to self-improvement.'

Bookseller of choice for maritime professionals

The Marine Society is a leading supplier of books to individual seafarers and maritime corporates. It has a depth of professional knowledge in this specialised book market and enjoys close links to key trade suppliers such as the International Maritime Organization, the Nautical Institute and Lloyds Register-Fairplay. It is fast becoming the bookseller of choice for maritime professionals.

It can supply books and other multimedia materials such as e-books and CD-Roms quickly and at competitive rates with any profits re-invested in activities that support seafarers.

Now available is the new edition of the STCW 2010 with Manilla Amendments as well as the ISF published *Guidelines on the IMO STCW Convention.*

Please help the Marine Society to help more seafarers by buying your books from its online portal, visit **www.msbookshop.org**

Visit **www.marine-society.org** to find out more or email **ms@ms-sc.org** to request a free information pack and don't forget to check it out on Facebook: **www.facebook.com/marinesociety**

THE MARINE SOCIETY PROVIDES SERVICES TO ENHANCE LEARNING, WELL-BEING AND LIFESTYLE...

We've more experience in the field of distance learning than any other maritime sector provider.

Working with education and training providers to deliver seafarer-focused opportunities for quality-assured personal and professional development.

Supporting seafarers is our strength

Find out more at: **marine-society.org**

MARINE SOCIETY

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Email ms@ms-sc.org

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TS LOOKOUT SEA CADET UNIT VISIT FORT GEORGE FOR FINAL TIME

On a cold but bright February morning 14 Sea and Royal Marine Cadets from the Burnley unit T.S. Lookout travelled to Liverpool to visit the RFA Fort George. The cadets were invited onboard and hosted by the ships RN detachment from the Maritime Aviation Support Force (MASF). LOGS(SC) Daniel Crawshaw, who helps out at his home town's unit when on leave co-ordinated to days events.

The cadets aged from 11 to 15 enjoyed a tour of the ships Logistics, Flight and warfare departments including the bridge, Ops room and flight deck while also enjoying the culinary delights that RFA cooks had to offer.

For the majority of the cadets it was their first introduction to the RFA and most had no idea that the Royal Naval personnel embarked and operated on their ships. Along with a tour of the soon to be de-commissioned ship the unit received a cricket set and RFA Fort George crested team bibs along with a stereo unit.

GOLDEN SE LONG COURSE WELCOMES THE RFA

This year's System Engineering Long Course 50 started off on the right footing by making history as the fiftieth course to pass through the Royal Navy's prestigious Weapons Engineering School, MWS COLLINGWOOD.

Originally programmed for four System Engineer Officers to attend, but owing to a high level of RFA operational tasking only three could be spared, which in itself shows flexibility in the service and commitment of its people.

With now only three keen and enthusiastic System Engineers on course, making a decent RFA five-a-side football team was always going to be difficult.

The corridor inside the System Engineering training unit SEMT provided a snap shot of courses of years gone by. Of particular note was the photograph of Mr John Chadwick, if only we were armed with that whist attending FOST!!!!!!

On day one the pace was set and our future for the next 16 weeks was mapped out.

The Long Course is designed to introduce System Engineer Officers into new and sometimes not so new military systems and communications equipment found onboard our ships. The course is a mixture of practical and theory, but being in a position to fault find on units such as Gyros, Radar and Communications systems was found to be extremely useful.

Midway through the course a week of leadership training was programmed. Uncertain of what level of fitness was required motivated us to visit the gym on a regular basis in preparation. As it turned out the first two days are classroom based with dog watch sports sessions to finish off. Day Three involved practical leadership tasks, which entailed a full day of practical time based leadership exercises. The final element was basic coaching techniques and how we can use this successfully to train and encourage learning in others.

The standard of instruction was excellent. Generally the instructors were extremely enthusiastic. As with all ex Naval personnel, there were plenty of dits built into the classes, but not to be out done we gave as good as we got.

Overall all classes were enjoyable and greatly received.

The grand-finale of the course was to be the project; our title was 'Benefits and disadvantages of a CBRN electronic stateboard and tagging system in the RFA'.

In order to investigate and research the above we visited HMS DAUNTLESS Type 45 Destroyer, and the Royal Navy's Damage Control Training school facility at PHOENIX. Both visits were extremely informative and gave us our first insight in to this new technology.

We also visited L3 Communications in Bristol who recently won the contact to supply an electronic damage control system to the new Queen Elizabeth Carriers.

From Left to Right:
3/O(SE) David Dobson, 3/O(SE) Martin Burton and 3/O(SE) Alastair MacDonald

During our stay in wardroom, there were a number of social functions organised. As mess social calendars go, HMS COLLINGWOOD's takes some beating, the highlight was the Trafalgar Night Dinner, which could only be described as spectacular. All glammed up in mess dress SELC 50 had a great night, with 1/ O (SE) Bob Kemp, 2/O (X) Lisa Black and 3/O (SE) Tim James also in attendance, the RFA were well represented. The guest speaker was Mr Willie Walsh the Chief Executive of British Airways. His speech, unlike his aircraft this year, took off and landed with a huge round of applause. The Trafalgar Night was one never to be forgotten. There was also a cabaret night, where we were invited to sit with the base Commodore and Commander; thankfully not too many faux pas occurred.

The majority of spare time in the evenings and weekends was taken up with project work as there was no scope for this during the working day. This hard work and effort, paid off as the group were given a very credible Good as a final grade. The presentation on the final day, with Commodore (E) Preston invited as the guest VIP, could not have been delivered in a more professional, manner. All guests thoroughly enjoyed the presentation, and on completion a touch of Christmas was added to create a festive ambiance.

SELC 50 would like to thank the Royal Fleet Auxiliary in allowing us to attend the Long Course.

ROYAL LOGISTIC CORPS (RLC) TO ROYAL FLEET AUXILIARY (RFA) VIA AFGHANISTAN

WO2 Jamie Campbell, 38, is much like any other army Warrant Officer: he sorts the world out, frequently works in a hot and sandy environment and is far away from home for months at a time.

Except, that is where the similarities end for Jamie. As the RLC Warrant Officer embarked in RFA Lyme Bay WO2 Campbell has been based on the ship for the past few months. Lyme Bay's an amphibious support ship of the Royal Fleet Auxiliary, currently based in Bahrain working in support of the Royal Navy and Jamie is the first RLC Movement Controller to hold this prestigious appointment.

Jamie joined the Royal Corps Transport in 1990 and in 1998 became a Movement Controller. Movement Controllers are responsible for organizing the transportation of troops, ammunition, vehicles, and supplies; everything from the paperwork through to planning the route.

His tours of duty have to date included Afghanistan, Bosnia, Northern Ireland, Kosovo, Iraq and Macedonia.

RFA Lyme Bay is a Bay Class landing ship dock (auxiliary) (LSD(A)), designed to carry over 350 troops, 24 Challenger tanks or 150 trucks. The flight deck is large enough to operate both Chinook and the MV 22 Osprey, an American multi-mission aircraft with both a vertical takeoff and landing (VTOL) capability. What makes these landing ships so versatile is their ability to "flood" the back of the ship by opening the stern which allows landing craft to operate.

Currently Lyme Bay is operating as a giant supply ship for the four Royal Navy Mine Counter Measure Vessels permanently deployed in the Arabian Gulf. Her presence enables ships that were originally designed for an endurance of just a few days at sea to remain on task for extended periods and in this case up to three years in the Arabian Gulf, where temperatures can regularly hit 50 degrees Celsius.

WO2 Campbell explains that his job is extremely varied and can at times be very pressurised

"It's always challenging when you have a full team on board. One moment I can be doubling up as the Flight Deck Officer, assisting in landing a Chinook and the next I can be making sure that trucks are being loaded onto landing craft."

WO Campbell in his office

At the moment WO2 Campbell is managing two entire MCMV ships' companies that are on board Lyme Bay. The Royal Navy rotate their crews which saves a vessel having to return all the way to the UK, reducing the carbon footprint and fuel costs as well as enabling the ship to stay on task for a prolonged period of time . As the RLC's Warrant Officer assigned to the ship he is responsible for ensuring that it all runs smoothly.

And the best part of his job?

"I enjoy the chance to meet so many interesting and varied people. This is completely different to my tours in Afghanistan and the Balkans and it is a privilege to be the first Movement Controller to become the RLC Warrant Officer embarked in an RFA. Working with the Royal Fleet Auxiliary can provide its own unique challenges, particularly in rough weather!"

When not deployed, WO2 Campbell lives with his wife Lisa–Marie Ross and children in his native Lincoln.

OPERATIONAL UPDATE - VISIT OF TRAINING SHIP LOCHINVAR

Following a busy operational period, taking us in to the Baltic and back to our birth place, Scotts Shipbuilders on the Clyde, RFA FORT ROSALIE finally entered refit at Cammell Laird, Birkenhead, from September to November 2010. The refit package progressed according to schedule with personnel moving back on board on 29th Nov and we eventually sailed from the Mersey on 20th December. The Christmas festival period was spent alongside in Plymouth where the ship's company was able to enjoy leave with their families and then in early January 2011 Fort Rosalie sailed to Crombie Jetty arriving on the 6th Jan to commence regeneration. Re-loading of the ship's cargo and re-storing all of the equipment proceeded to schedule and we started to increase the volume and complexity of training as February approached. The was accepted back in to Fleet service mid Feb when we continued with Operational Sea Training throughout Mar, restoring us to full operational capability, ready for all of our forthcoming commitments.

We are expected to join the Response Force Task Group (RFTG), led by the Commodore of the UK Task Group (COMUKTG), as it forms in April on RFTG Cougar 11. We'll look to update you at regular milestones over the forthcoming weeks and months.

On a non operational perspective, Sea Cadet Unit, TS Lochinvar (South Queensferry) visited us between 28-30th Jan. There was a total of 17 cadets accompanied by two staff, led by Lt (SCC) Colin Butcher RNR. The visit was organised by 3/O(E) Jacqui Lauder, who is an active member of the unit, assisted by SG1B Olly Stimpson, who is a member of TS 800 NAS (Kettering). After joining on Friday night and dumping their kit, the cadets were treated to an in-depth safety brief, including a detailed plan of their meals for the weekend as well as the times for the ship's shop, each of great interest!

Saturday was a hectic day full of most specialisations, including Morse code, rope work and fire fighting, whereas Sunday gave a lie in, at least until 0715, followed by a Hangar and Engine room tour, where the cadets were allowed to start the ship's emergency generator – good practise for the upcoming OST period. The rest of the morning was taken up by cleaning stations, ensuring that when the Commanding Officers of both Fort Rosalie and the unit inspected the accommodation, the white gloves were required! After a brief from the Executive Officer on the bridge, including a quick recruitment drive, the cadets invaded the crew cafeteria for the final time.

Hopefully a few faces will be seen walking up the gangway, discharge book in hand ready to sign on, in the future!

A LOGISTICAL MASTER

Jason Wallworth had wanted to do extra study to further his career opportunities for a number of years and when the opportunity came up he applied to study, for what was initially advertised as a Batchelor's degree. However during the application Jason was advised there was the option for people with the relevant experience to study for a Masters and having completed a Bachelor's previously he opted for the Master's course.

After a year's study between Sept until Sept 2010, he has now completed an MSc in Global Logistics & Supply Chain Management obtaining Distinction at Northumbria University. The work compromised of ten 5000 word essays and a 20,000 word dissertation. Each year the University gives an award for the most deserving student as voted for by the academic staff; Jason is pictured here receiving this award from Helen Lisle (CIPS Rep) as being only one of two students on the 2009/2010 to receive a Masters with Distinction.

Congratulations to Jason on completing the degree with distinction and for being awarded the most deserving student of the year.

Soduko Solution

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Printed by Holbrooks Printers Ltd, Portsmouth PO3 5HX