



THE NEWSLETTER

of the London and Home Counties Branch – January 2021

Whilst taking my course for 1st Mates examination, I had a chat with another officer from Cunard. He told me that he was in the Royal Naval Reserve, and that it was quite good fun and that I should have a go. Now I knew that RFA management was not too keen on RFA officers joining the RNR, as they felt that when World War Three came along officers should stay with the RFA and not go off to the RN. Anyway, I applied, and nobody from Empress State Building attempted to stop me, so I went for an interview with the Admiral Commanding Reserves at Admiralty Arch in London and was accepted. In those days the RNR was divided into lists, and merchant navy or professional officers were List 1 or the old RNR, whilst List 3 were the original RNVR, or amateur 'wavy navy' sailors. Other lists were for fishermen, and various other people who were remotely connected to the sea.

In general List 1 officers served directly with the RN and not with the RNR Divisions, so my first appointment was in a survey vessel *HMS Fawn*. It was very instructive, and we surveyed the south west approaches to the Irish Sea. As this was a small ship and surveying was putting a brick over the side on a piece of string, when it became too rough, *Fawn* headed for port, as it is not possible to do an accurate survey if the ship is bouncing up and down 20 feet every minute. Commanding officers of ships liked having a List 1 officer as a watchkeeper because they know that

they will probably not be called to the bridge every ten minutes. One of the most interesting was in *HMS Shavington* on fishery protection duties. I was supposed to join in Liverpool, but a port strike meant that the vessel was berthed in the Isle of Man, I had to get a ferry across, and that was the only time I have ever visited that island.

Going over to foreign, and British trawlers, was instructive, the former making it quite plain that we were not welcome, using a typical Gallic gesture of disdain when going on board and sharpening their gutting knives in a menacing way. Coming up to a group of Geordie fishing boats at dawn, I heard them warning each other that the fuzz had arrived, being described as such was a first, and last, time that I have ever been described as a policeman.



...sorry 'Peter old chap' if her first language is not English you'll have to throw her back... foreword RNXS manual and paragraph 1234.5 sub-paras (r), (f) and possibly (a) of that darn Common Fisheries Policy!"

However, we did not just board at any time, and so as to not interfere with their work, we would usually only board when they were pulling in their nets. The Ton

class minesweepers/hunters were renowned for their ability to roll on wet grass, and when I joined another one *HMS Shoulton* in Portland, there was another List 1 officer already on board. He was a P&O officer, and he asked me if I suffered from sea sickness, when I told him not usually, he let me know that the regulars all had *mal de mere* as soon as the weather deteriorated. This in fact proved to be correct, and he and I did six on six off watches to cover for the poor dears! Of course Nelson was supposed to have suffered similarly, so they had an honourable predecessor.



My final ship was the frigate *HMS Andromeda* where we did a quick cruise to Lisbon in Portugal. Upon leaving Plymouth we did a night RAS with a Rover boat (can't remember which one*), and the CO knowing I was from the RFA told everyone to learn from me as I was the professional RAS man. He put me in charge of the replenishment station, which was a bit embarrassing, because in all my time in the RFA I had never been on the receiving end of the hose.

Luckily for me, the CPO in charge knew what to do, and I was delegated to man the wands, so not too much loss of face for me*. As officer-of-the-watch on this ship, I noted that the midshipman had his head buried in the Decca Navigator, so I asked him to show me where we were. At that time, we were about ten miles off the coast of Portugal, and it was a clear night. He seemed somewhat confused and I soon found out that he had let the machine jump a few lanes, and really did not want to

admit it, and more importantly did not know how to correct it. I told him to go out and take some bearings of the various lighthouses that could be seen, something which he obviously thought that only ancient mariners (like me) did.

This officer and I did not really get on, the previous night he had thrown up, and ordered a signalman to clear it up. I told him to get a bucket and clear it up himself, which did not endear him to me, but the signalman became my friend. Of course, it was not always ship appointments, I also did various courses, including warfare, and the dreaded Naval Control of Shipping. This course was a relic of World War 2, and List 1 officers made every effort to avoid it, however I was caught up, and had to go through the motions. It was mainly about organising convoys before their sailing but it was clear even then that it was a bit out of date, and I think the whole idea was closed down a few years later. One positive aspect of the courses, was that it taught me how to use some of the kit that was put in RFA's at that time, but nobody was told how to use it. I distinctly remember the sonar Type 182 (?) unifofoxer which was installed in the *Olynthus (Olwen)* but as I recall it was a bit of kit which nobody at that time knew how to use. One course at *HMS Dryad* was very useful as it was a weapons tactical group, but for those who have attended at *Dryad* will remember the wardroom of Southwick Park was General Eisenhower's head quarters before D-Day, and there was this huge montage of the plan for the attack on the wall. We were mixed with a class of SD officers, and at the final exam one of them who I got to know, agreed with me that as I was good at ship recognition, and he was better than me at most other things, we would sit next to each other and leave our papers for each to see what the other had written. It worked well, and we both passed. One of the requirements of List

1 officers was to liaise with merchant vessels called up in time of war. I was involved in one such exercise 'Anchor Express' which was to put Royal Marines ashore in Northern Norway to support the northern flank. To do this ferries were called up, and took the marines on each one. Our little band of List 1's joined *HMS Intrepid* at Plymouth, and we sailed to rendezvous with the ferries. Whilst on *Intrepid* I celebrated my 40th birthday, and as I was the only man in the wardroom, I celebrated it with a drink with the wardroom steward.

I was allocated the good ship *Winston Churchill*, which despite its name was a Danish ro-ro vessel. One of the first jobs was to put up black out curtains, which in reality meant using large dustbin bags to cover the windows. This was only moderately successful, and we got a bollocking from *Intrepid* that we were still lit up like a Christmas tree. One problem was that the task group meandered along at ten knots which was too slow for the stabilisers to work. In heavy weather the vessel rolled horribly, and despite the master pleading with me we could not get the convoy commander to speed up a bit. As the ferries had been taken straight out of their normal work, the duty-free shop had been shut and the booze was still there. One large wave came on board and smashed into the glass surrounds of the shop, and flooded the place. The marine commander immediately put a guard on the shop, until they left the ship. In general, the RNR was a bit of good fun, and in my subsequent employment, I would threaten my director, that come World War Three when he was called up, I would have him cleaning the toilets with his toothbrush if he shouted at me again.

I suppose the RNR as I knew it has probably vanished, but as the present RFA is just the Royal Navy with different

sleeve lace (*and cap badge*) I doubt that they would learn anything from joining the RNR. [Peter Harrison]

**ED "heroic but shameful admissions from our Chairman."*

What shall we do with the drunken sailor...??



- 3-4 slices of streaky bacon, the fatter the better!!
- Peanut butter – crunchy or smooth
- White bread – you want something like Mothers Pride or Kingsmill, medium sliced
- Marmalade – Golden Shred works really well here

...Dead Elvis (.....serving one)

Heat a knob of lard in a frying pan and fry the bacon till crisp. Remove bacon and retain bacon fat in pan for frying sandwich.

Spread peanut butter on one slice of bread and marmalade on the other. Layer bacon in the middle. Sandwich together and put aside for a few minutes to meld together

Meanwhile heat up bacon fat in pan

Retrieve sandwich and cut into four triangles

Add to pan and fry till golden brown and drain on kitchen paper. Let cool a few minutes, then eat straight from kitchen counter, accompanied by a cup of builders tea*.

**alternatively Chief Cook's cocoa.*



Life after the RFA...

Part 2 – The transfer to Malta proved most enjoyable, very quickly the children were swimming in the warm Mediterranean Sea. With face masks

and snorkels they would spend a lot of time in the sea around the rocks watching the small fish.

Work-wise there were ships under repair, docking and the routine surveys. However, just occasionally a large yacht would turn up with request for a survey. A few of the larger yachts had permanent crews. Their engineers job sounded 'very interesting' with all the bikini clad figures wandering around.

Life came back to normal very quickly when one had to visit an old bulk carrier or something even less exotic such as a livestock carrier. One such ship came in for repairs, completely different to the yachts. The first day was spent on the paperwork and the start of the surveys, that evening when I arrived home I was greeted by my wife, her comments were not the ones I expected. The second and subsequent days I had very clear instructions. I had to strip off everything outside the door of the flat (fortunately we were on the top floor with no other flats) and put all my clothes in a plastic bag. They went straight into the washing machine and I went into the shower. It seems that I had picked up the gentle fragrance of the sheep that had sailed from Africa to the Persian Gulf.

We used to go to the beach at the weekends, on one occasion it was littered with what looked like footballs. On closer inspection it was balls of oil/sludge which had been discharged by a tanker, tank cleaning en route to the Suez Canal. The beach was a mess and took a long time to clean. I'd never appreciated the amount and nature of the discharge from a tanker's tank cleaning.

Malta was a busy port with ships coming and going all the time. One other occasion was to survey, for my first time, a ship that had been on fire. It had started in the engine room and worked its way upwards and into the accommodation. The crew had

managed to control and limit the fire but there was extensive damage.

At the beginning of August, after nearly a year in Malta enjoying the weather and conditions, a telex arrived. It was very short wanting an answer by return. Would I go to Rio De Janeiro? If so, I would have to arrive there by the beginning of September?

The first thing I had to do was to phone my wife, then a dash home to discuss the transfer and the arrangements. As it happened, our neighbour in the flat below had visited Rio and was quite supportive of the transfer. An hour of discussions and a list of things to be done, it was back to the office and reply saying that 'we would go!' Then the rush started.



**"...built on the cheap ...not a'tall Sir!
...but Colin our new Surveyor has
confirmed that daft Noah did foolishly
save the Woodworm!!"**

Cancel the lease on the apartment, arrange tax clearance, book flight tickets, inform the school and numerous other details. One week later we were on our way to London. The kids were very excited to be going home. It was good to be home but our rushing around didn't stop and for the next couple of weeks the panic continued sorting out all the paperwork. We had to have medicals, visas and several other little items had to be dealt with such as our house, cars, etc. All resolved before we could book our flight.

Three weeks after our return we were on our way to Rio. The children thought this was great and were very excited to be flying again and going to another country. We were a little nervous, minor details such as language, driving on the

other side of the road, security etc. Two bulk carriers were being built in Rio, one was nearly finished and the second just started. The attending surveyor had been taken ill and sea trials on the first one was in early September, hence the urgency.

A long-haul flight of many hours to Rio via Madrid and Recife. We were met at the airport by a colleague and taken to our new home, there was a problem. The previous surveyor had one child, we had three and the apartment had only two small bedrooms. We had to book into a hotel while we found a larger apartment. While we were in the hotel there was a public holiday and so we took the opportunity to visit the Corco Vados, the statue of Jesus overlooking Rio. Then there was Sugar Loaf Mountain and numerous beaches, it was fantastic! **[to be continued]**
[Colin Spencer]



...LOOTING or PIRACY?

continued... Upon coming within hailing distance, the NAV *Upnor* was advised that *Warrior* had been instructed to deliver an urgent hand message from the Admiralty. Somewhat surprisingly no questions were asked and a boat crewed by four men left for the NAV. On boarding the *Upnor* the Master was informed that his vessel was being detained, that he was to proceed to Ballycotton Bay in company with the *Warrior* and that no attempt to escape should be made.

Arriving at 0100 on the 30th, unloading was immediately commenced using locally pressed men as stevedores, who incidentally, each reportedly received, the equivalent, of '£7.10p for their labour! Quoting from

C-in-C's report 'the raiders withdrew at about 1030', probably due to the sighting of two destroyers (HM Ships *Heather* and *Strenuous*) outside the bay, before unloading had been completed. This early departure meant that a proportion of the arms and ammunition remained onboard *Upnor*.

The report also noted that after the 'raiders' had departed the local population 'continued looting and braking (open) cases and throwing the cargo of the *Upnor* into confusion'. Before leaving, the crew of the *Warrior* were order to remain in Ballycotton until 1300 and although no similar instructions to the Master of the *Upnor* are recorded, a later remark does suggest that the vessel was 'ashore', meaning she may have grounded on a falling tide and therefore been unable to leave. *Warrior* was subsequently met by the two destroyers at 1330 off Power Head, east of Cork Harbour. Having ascertained that *Upnor* was still in Ballycotton harbour, *Heather* and *Strenuous* found her afloat and tied up alongside the harbour wall. *Upnor* and *Warrior* escorted by the two warships returned to Haulbowline Naval Base.

Under guard, the crews of both ships were questioned in an effort to establish exactly what they knew of the events that had taken place during the preceding forty-eight hours.

In the case of the *Warrior* the Master, having been detained in and removed from his Agents office on the morning of 29th March, he obviously had no knowledge of events at sea. However, he did give a graphic description of armed men entering the office seeking to charter the tug on behalf of the Provisional Government (in fact they were anti-treaty members of the IRA). When told that this would not be possible as the vessel was already on charter, they left only to return a few minutes later to say that they had commandeered *Warrior* and now

intended to detain the Master. He was removed from Horne's offices and remained a prisoner until 1400 the next day. When questioned regarding his captors, he said the men were armed with revolvers, were not in uniform and that he could recognise 'all I had to deal with'. Their leader, and the person in charge of the operation was later named as Thomas Berry an ex (IRA?) liaison officer in Cork.

Following the questioning, C-in-C Western Approaches (Vice Admiral Sir Earnest Gaunt KCB, CMG) was authorised by the Admiralty to release the tug's crew provided there was no suspicion of complicity on their part. Though no details exist regarding this authorisation, the crew being entirely English, and having regard to their forceful detention and subsequent events, there would seem to have been no grounds for further detention. No doubt *Warrior* and her crew were released without delay.

[to be concluded] [Shane Redmond]



Any port in a storm...

A document found in TNA deals with the transfer of 'surplus' T124 ratings, (whose experience was actually appreciated and there was a great desire to retain them for sea service) so they would be transferred to ships awaiting crews in various ports. *RFA Polshannon* (okay so you have never heard of her) in 1916 was fitting out in Millwall Dock (London). The CO requested that all ratings required to

complete his complement should arrive on Wednesday 5th December. Under the charge of an 'Outdoor Officer' of the Board of Trade they left Liverpool with instructions to report to Transport Officer Thames District.

The CO (Master) had been told of their impending arrival and instructed his Purser and Chief Steward (yes he had both) to see everything necessary in way of bedding and victuals be ready on their arrival. He was then told by the Purser – oh dear!! The bedding had not arrived. As the men were due to arrive at about 9.30pm (remember this is December – dark and probably wet and knackered after a long journey south) it was difficult to make any satisfactory arrangements for the accommodation of these chaps. Records state that the CO and the Divisional Naval Transport Officer spared no pains in doing the best possible – this resulted eventually in the men sleeping at the local Salvation Army Shelter!!

**The year that was 2020 -
Hands! Face! Space! ...
Yes, he is a famous frog and is
confused by Zulu time, Alpha
time and the new fangled UT but
his sentiment reflects ...wisdom!**



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All opinions expressed in are those of individual members of our 'stay-in club' and not of the Association.

