



London and Home Counties Branch
The newsletter



BAGSHOT PARK

9th April 2020

Dear Ray,

In these strange and unprecedented times, we are all facing new challenges, issues and uncertainty. I know that you are trying to continue to operate as best you can in what are especially difficult circumstances.

Life for the Association and the members cannot be easy. Whatever you are doing in this situation to overcome the hurdles, I wish you strength, imagination and every good fortune.

Please know that you are in my thoughts and prayers at this time. Look after yourselves and each other. Also know that I will do my best to help and support you in whatever way I can as we move forwards.

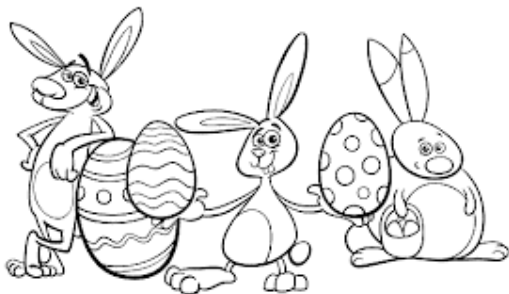
*Yours sincerely,
Edward*

HRH The Earl of Wessex KG, GCVO

Captain (Retd) Ray Bennett
Royal Fleet Auxiliary Association

Well in my last rambling I wrote about getting blood-out-of-a-stone. I am now forced to eat my words as the editor ('Young' Fernley) has been awash with a drip feed of items for inclusion, so we are now issuing you our second newsletter, after we have eaten all the Easter Eggs.

You will have seen previously there was a recipe for the Hammy, Eggy, Cheesy thing, something that I fail to recall ever having eaten at sea... however, my memory is not the best, but looking at it, as my partner is Belgian, it seems like a poor man's *Croque Madam*. As Easter has just sneaked passed us, at a rate of knots, and chocolate is filling up in my cabin, which, if our local stasi (Met police) allows, will have me dramatically putting on the kilos (in real English 'pounds & ounces').



Chocolate or pilchards? Is this our new à la carte RFA menu?

Having said that, an article by Janice Turner in the Times (*that's the London Times*) was very interesting. She said that she had talked to a professional mountaineer who said that when you are in a lockdown, do not buy chocolate, biscuits and the like, but purchase things you do not like canned pilchards. Then you will be reluctant to eat anything until you are so desperate that you will have

to open the can. Sounds like a good idea to me, I am surprised Weight Watchers/Slimmer's World has not cottoned on to the idea, so if anyone else has similar ideas as to how to keep the weight down, I for one will appreciate it. In this newsletter we do try to keep off the virus subject, but it is the elephant-in-the room, so keep safe and also keep the items for the another edition drifting in. [Peter Harrison]

Ed. Failure to remember the Hammy, Eggy, Cheesy and to actually call it a 'thing' is **** and no blame should be placed attributed to the ship's cook.

RFAA AGM and Reunion re-scheduled...

Well the elephant-in-the room has intruded. AGM and Reunion have been cancelled. Note for your diary they are re-scheduled for Trafalgar Day – 21st October in Torquay.

Welfare Officer's summary

I have been contacting members of the London Branch since January. In January I phoned 24 members but managed to speak to only nine. Of the others there were wrong numbers, answer phone but no call back or just no answer.

In February, I didn't do any but thought that in light of this lockdown I should make the effort. During March I managed to phone 54 members with varying success. Again, some issues were 'number not recognized', 'answer phone' but no call back or simply 'no answer'. However, I did manage to speak to 27 of you. So far this month I've contacted 6 and spoke to 3.

Those that I spoke to were very appreciative and I've had the most enjoyable conversations, some quite long. One even phoned back from his yacht, in port about 50 miles north of Gib. He was enjoying the sunshine and the wine. Made me quite envious. My contact work will continue. [Colin Spencer]

...do you remember those Curry Evenings in the Mess ...



...and some people think 'social isolation' is something new!

Ian Fleming's Curry Goat

This is reportedly the original recipe, obtained from Dave Shennan, who some of you will know, and whose father was Chief Medical Officer in Jamaica during the fifties and lived next door to Ian Fleming.

A good butcher will be able to get goat meat for you. Ask the butcher to prepare the meat for you. You don't want to be left wrestling with half a goat in the suburban confines of your kitchen. If you can't get goat, it is also

good with mutton (or, at a pinch, older lamb or hogget).

Ingredients

3 lbs goat meat in 2-inch cubes (I prefer shoulder to leg)

Marinade

Juice of 1 large lime (or two small ones)

6 cloves of garlic, crushed

2 onions, sliced thinly

2 level teaspoons salt

2 level teaspoons ground black pepper

2 teaspoons fresh thyme leaves (I have used dried with no ill effect)

2 teaspoons Jamaican Jerk seasoning

1 level teaspoon ground allspice

1 heaped tablespoon medium or hot curry powder (as preferred)

2 red birds eye chillies finely chopped

2 large tomatoes chopped (or 1 small can)

3-4 tablespoons fresh coriander (chopped)

4 tablespoons coconut oil or melted butter

1-2 teaspoons brown sugar

To Cook

3 medium sweet potatoes peeled and cut into small cubes

Method

Place goat in large non-reactive bowl or container and add all marinade ingredients. Massage well into goat meat with hands. Leave in fridge for up to 48 hours but at least 12.

Transfer to casserole dish or ovenproof stockpot and add diced sweet potato. Add around 150-200 ml of water, the mix will produce its own rich sauce. Seal lid with a foil disc pleated in centre to retain juices.

Cook in a cool oven (gas mark ½, 100c) for around 4 ½ to 5 hours. Let stand to rest for 15-20 mins before serving. (even better the next day if there is any left!)

Serve with Jamaican rice and peas, buttermilk cornbread, and banana chutney. Or whatever you fancy really. Chips included!!
[Montezuma]



...Letter from Malta

Why and how did I join the RFA... I'd just finished my apprenticeship in Malta Dockyard as an Engine Fitter. No other prospects in sight except the blue yonder. Walked to the RFA offices in the yard. Interview made for the following day on board *RFA Blue Ranger* tied up at Hamilton Wharf.

Interviewed by Chief Engineer Arthur from Aberdeen and Second Engineer Andrew Lauder from Rosyth. It was a doddle. A week later offered the post of Junior Engineer on *RFA Black Ranger*. Both ships were on refuelling duties off Cyprus during their independence conflict.

Joined on the day of departure in November 1957. A grey day with fierce 'nor..easterly' that postponed departure to the following day. Film shown on board

that evening was the musical 'Carousel'. Left Grand Harbour riding the waves as they lashed the rocks on Ricasoli Point breakwater.

Watch keeping was with the Third Engineer David Ike from Hull. I was as sick as any sea dog can be – an unpleasant baptismal experience. No legs! No appetite! Feeding the bilges was the routine for the three days to Famagusta. Then waking up to a fine peaceful sunny morning blue sea and sky to the sound of seagulls off shore at anchor was heaven on earth.

Like St Paul who was shipwrecked on that Island some two thousand years before I survived to tell the tale. [John Caruana – Malta Liaison]

...Letter from Singapore

Many years ago I was sent to an RFA tanker based in Singapore and spent 14 most enjoyable months on that ship. I met my wife there, her father was in the RAF based in Changi, so it holds very good memories

Normally, the small tanker (*RFA Gold Ranger*) I was on supported the minesweeping flotilla and we would go off with them to various locations, to Philippines, Bangkok, Saigon (as it was called then) and a lovely island called Pulau Tioman (where they filmed the 'South Pacific').

However, it was at the time of the Indonesia Confrontation. We were rushed up to Borneo and on one occasion we had to support a platoon of Royals (marines) landed to protect a sawmill. Yes you have read it correct ...a sawmill!

The background: we were very close to the border and one lunch

time as was our want we were having a pre-lunch beer and discussed how we were supporting the marines. The Old Man said that he had a pistol in the safe. The Mate was keen on target shooting and had a 0.22 gun, we had a couple of line throwing rifles, then there were the distress flares and if all that failed we could throw empty beer cans!



The wee Gold Ranger with awnings fitted to prevent their engineers getting sunburnt when in the bar.

After I had been on her for nearly 14 months it was time for me to head back to the UK and study for my Second's ticket. She was a lovely little tanker with an excellent after deck which was arranged as a bar. As per usual there was a going away party, in Sembawang, unfortunately, we were not alongside but moored just off the naval base. The Mate demonstrated his prowess with his gun (I won't say how) and the Radio Officer who was feeling the heat and humidity of Singapore decided to go for a swim and jumped over the side. We walked over to where he had jumped in expecting to see him floating on the surface, but no Radio Officer! After about a moment we were discussing how long could we hold our breath, a half a minute, a minute – but still no Radio Officer!

At this point worry started to set in. Has he drowned himself? What do we do? Etc. etc. A good five minutes after he had jumped in, he appeared. He had swam under the ship and back around the stern of vessel. The going away party ended and we went over to JB (Jahore Bahru) for a curry.

A few months later the vessel was in Borneo this time armed with a sub-machine gun for defence. The duty officer had the gun. So I was told, the duty officer one night was the Radio Officer and he was itching to test the gun. As it happened in that area the local people would drift fish at night. The ship was at anchor and the local fishermen were fishing. The Radio Officer, who had a very strong accent, called out to the fishermen to show a light, unfortunately they didn't show a light so he fired.

I recall the gun was taken off on the return to Sembawang. Those Radio Officers!! [Colin Spencer]

...Mombasa memories

I first saw Mombasa in 1964 when I flew out to join *RFA Fort Sandusky*. Unfortunately the RFA Agent had not told ESB [the Mad House] that she had sailed the day before. So I had two weeks in the Queens Hotel – which was just around the corner from the Castle Hotel. So after I had asked the Agent for some local currency I spent a good deal of the day sitting at the front of the Castle watching the locals go by. I found out that all the local bars were in the High Street and that down at the beach there was a so called night club that went by the name of 'New

Florida'. After *Fort Sandusky* returned to Mombasa the ship sailed down to the Beira Patrol to give food pallets to the resident warship. After doing that for a few months we sailed for Singapore and a refit. *Sandusky* had a Chinese crew and they had a few chickens onboard that roamed around the decks and a small white dog. There was no air conditioning on the ship so everyone had fans in their cabins.

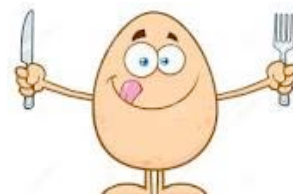
I next visited Mombasa in 1979 on *RFA Tarbatness* whilst she was on a Far East sales tour. We had a week in Mombasa and I remember going ashore with two Army officers from the Military Sales Tour. The next time I saw Mombasa was on an old *Tide* boat when we spent nearly three weeks anchored out in the centre of the harbour. I spent a few evenings at the Mission to Seamen which was on the outskirts of town before walking into town to visit bars and take in the night life. I met a British ex-pat family who lived in the hills outside Mombasa and they entertained us. They had a swimming pool and quite a few RFA plaques on their bar wall. I've not seen Mombasa since but would like to go back once more to see how much it has changed. [Bob Nichols, Radio Officer]



Fort Sandusky Quiz: (a) Did she sail without him, or (b) or did he miss her? Answers to the editor.

...absolute despair

It has come as quite a shock to all members of our Branch to hear that cash will no longer be taken at the Garrick Club. This club beloved of barristers, publishers, actors and even Ancient Mariners said '*that it was costing them at least £1,000 a year to bank cash received*'...ahh! The club is trying to go cashless – see you on the long table...



Optimism chaps ...optimism!!

...Christmas Lunch?

We propose to exercise survivors optimism so please add this to your diaryThe Branch 'Stay-in Club' Christmas Lunch at the Admiralty (Pub in Trafalgar Sq) 8th December 2020.

Flying the flag...

You may have missed it because of some overriding media coverage... our Primary Casualty Receiving Facility *RFA Argus* sailed at the beginning of the month taking her huge bulk (28,000 tons) and medical facilities off to the Caribbean for Hurricane aid and if required Virus relief.

Argus details are available online at <http://historicalrfa.org/archived-stories68/2600-rfa-argus-the-fighting-hospital-ship-argus>

rfaa.london@gmail.com
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