



London and Home Counties Branch

The newsletter

Well this is the third newsletter that we have produced during the lockdown, hopefully it will not be too long before we can be let out of prison. Having said that, the disquieting news going the rounds is that for those of us over 70 years old maybe required to stay-in until September 2021. As this includes a (large) proportion of our readers, I trust that you will be informing your MP's that you will be considering your votes at the next election.

Living in Clapham Junction, public transport is a major part of the traffic here, not only the trains, but the buses as well. It is interesting looking at them all, as there are very few passengers, but the number of them on the road, seems to be much the same as before the virus. Most are carrying air around, or at best one or two passengers, but they are now free as the front entrance is out of use, which is where the Oyster card reader is situated. As my house backs onto the railway line, I have a fine view of the trains, and again as Clapham Junction has 2,000 trains a day, the reduction for a Sunday service reduces to maybe 1,000 a day. Most are still 10 or 12 car trains, with perhaps 2 or 3 passengers, so it is interesting to know why they keep such lengths going. If any reader is a train buff

perhaps they could let me know. As we are also on the approach path to Heathrow, the fantastic reduction in flights is very noticeable, maybe four or five a day. However of course whilst this is a pleasant reduction in noise, I am fully aware of the losses in jobs and the uncertainty that this is causing in people's livelihoods.

Finally, in view of the editor's opprobrium regarding my remarks on the hammy, eggy, cheesy thing, I have vowed to try this mainstay of naval and RFA menus as soon as I can get hold of eggs. Likewise, as someone who has never done home baking before, I am now trying out bread making with some success, although once again flour, or lack of it, is a problem.

Looking forward to our AGM, are we allowed to have a beer (or two) whilst we participate?

[Peter Harrison]

...soft touch for sea sailors
Do you remember weeks ago we almost had a national panic over toilet rolls ... you may also remember in 1975.... when the Americans never did think much of the 'Government Property' brand of toilet paper and apparently...on one occasion, visiting Americans as a parting gift to their RN host left a consignment of soft and gentle tissues.

Then the Service has had to face the dire implications of 'The Control of Pollution Act 1974' and similar anti-pollution regulations now applicable throughout the world.

To enable HM Ships and RFAs to comply, approval has been given to the issue of the soluble type toilet paper as standard for all seagoing ships.

The final rub comes at the bottom of this official announcement:

'Papers, Toilet in Rolls Vocab 11391 must continue to be demanded by and supplied to shore establishments. Barrack stanchions must be made to suffer somehow!!' [Navy News October 1975 quoting DCI(RN)T491]



...letter from Singapore (contd.)

There was another even smaller RFA tanker (*RFA Eddyness*), more of a harbour oiler. One of the deck officers had been at sea during the war. This tanker spent most of her time in Sembawang and the officer would drive over to JB for a few beers etc and drive back (no breath tests in those days).

One evening when he came back he went into the dining room & bar and said that there was a snake on the gangway. As perhaps you can imagine the remarks varied from 'drunk again' etc. What did he do? Step over it, of course.

However, he was adamant and insisted that he was not that drunk.



Reminds one of the current recruitment advert ... "born in Blyth made in the RN"... well long before this "Eddyness was built in Blyth and made in the Royal Fleet Auxiliary".

Eventually, he persuaded his colleagues to come with him and see. They went to the gangway and sure enough there was the snake and it was a poisonous one. A short discussion followed, with the conclusion that the snake had been very lucky. Had the snake been foolish enough to have bitten the man, it would have died with alcohol poisoning. [Colin Spencer]

A voyage of discovery...

The *RRS Discovery* was built in 1962 for the National Institute of Oceanography (later to be the National Environmental Research Council), and used for general oceanographic research. She was named after Captain Scott's 1901 vessel and was the third one so called. She carried a scientific staff of about 30 plus a crew of 22 who were drawn from the RFA. Quite why the RFA was given this role, I have not found out, although no doubt there were sound reasons at the time. I was a cadet who still had three months to go before I had enough sea time to start my Second Mates course. The MOD (or was it still the Admiralty?)

therefore sent me to the *Royal Research Ship Discovery* as a Temporary Acting 4th Officer.

With this grand title I joined her at Millbay Docks, Plymouth in October 1966, knowing little or nothing about her or her role. We sailed two days later and proceeded to the Canary Islands, as I was still a cadet this was the first time, I had kept a bridge watch by myself. Routine on board was very much them and us, and when the Master, Captain Davies, let it be known that he wanted ties to be worn at dinner, he was given fairly short shrift by the scientists.

As a point of interest, officers appointed to *Discovery* had a different uniform to the RFA, above the rank lace was the Royal Crown, not the Diamond. Of course, unless you were assigned to the vessel for a lengthy period, it was not worth changing the uniform, and my recollection was that only the captain and chief officer wore this uniform.



Built by Hall Russell in Aberdeen managed by the RFA (from Empress State Bldg) 1962 to 1969. The 2,665 grt RRS Discovery completed her final research voyage in November 2012.

Whilst at sea for research purposes they would put a line down to nearly the bottom of the ocean, which could be several

thousand feet to see what they could come up with. This entailed the bridge keeping the vessel nearly stationary for several hours, so keeping the line as vertical as possible.

Unlike survey ships, that throw a brick over the side on a length of rope and measure the depths, the scientific objective was to study the marine life at those deep depths. I remember one that they brought up, which nobody had seen before, which caused, not unnaturally, great excitement. At other times we should chase shoals of fish, and when the shoal turned rapidly at 90 degrees, the scientists expected the ship to do likewise. When of course this didn't happen, they became angry at the bridge watchkeeper! We spent several days off this lonely island called Lanzarote, going around it several times searching for god know what and seeing nobody there. We finally had a spell ashore in Madeira in what was the one and only time I have set foot on that island. Whilst there I was given the task of quarterly checking the purser's food stores, because as that time the MOD did not trust the Purser to do it himself (I don't know why). This entailed going into the cold and fridge stores and counting everything in there, not a very onerous task, but very cold in the fridge. We arrived back in Plymouth at the end of November 1966 where I paid off to go for my Second's 'ticket. It was an enjoyable voyage doing and seeing things which you would never do in a normal RFA. It was comparable to my time in the RNR on a fishery protection vessel, something

completely different to playing at cowboys and Indians with the rest of the fleet. [Peter Harrison]



...did Cheoff not make it perfectly clear that this was to be a Vertrep and not a b*** Jackstay transfer!!**

My First Ship...

Many years ago, in the days of conscription a young dockyard engineer was nearing the end of his apprenticeship, this meant that he had to make a decision. Conscription or merchant navy? There was a third possibility, that was to delay the decision by another year's study. He opted for the extra year study only so he could play rugby. The extra year quickly passed and the decision time had arrived, again. On reviewing the pros-and-cons he decided to go for the Merchant Navy and because the RFA had an office in the dockyard he contacted them. A short interview followed and later he was informed that he had been accepted. One week

later, a letter arrived with instructions and a travel warrant. He was to join *RFA Cherryleaf* at Rosyth on 8th August. Panic – he had never travelled so far by himself! He would have to take a train from Plymouth to London Paddington Station, then to Kings Cross and catch the train to Edinburgh, then change trains for Rosyth.

Armed with two large suitcases and a holdall he joined the train in Plymouth – arriving Paddington in the afternoon – then a taxi to Kings Cross to find that there were several hours to wait for Edinburgh train. Struggling on board with all his baggage he found a seat and tried to relax. He arrived Edinburgh early the next morning to be told that there were no trains to Rosyth ... go to Inverkeithing. Here he was told – no trains to Rosyth – take a taxi – a relatively short journey. At the Rosyth Dockyard gate he informed the police that he was joining *RFA Cherryleaf* only to be told that there was no ship of that name there.

Initial reaction 'had he come to the right port?' Followed by 'what do I do?' The taxi then dropped him outside the Dockyard's RFA office. Upon entering the office with his two suitcases and holdall he announced that he was joining *RFA Cherryleaf*. They were very surprised and asked if the ship was coming to Rosyth...then they took pity on him and sat him in the meeting room with a cup of tea. Half an hour later, with big smiles they said that they had found his ship – she was on the way up river

and would be berthing in about an hour. What a relief!!!

Mid-morning this young engineer was taken to the dockside where his ship was berthing. When the guys on board saw him there were a lot of calls to know who he was relieving. With the gangway was in place, they sent down two of the crew to help this young engineer with his luggage and to took him to the Chief Engineer's cabin. Knocking on his door he introduced himself. The Chief asked him where his boiler suit was? "In my suitcase Sir". The Chief then asked if it was "on top of the suitcase?" "Yes Chief", "get it on and get down the engine room". Fortunately, there was another young engineer nearby who helped and shortly they were going down to the engine room and meeting the other engineers.

The ship was small by modern day standards but much bigger than the frigates he had been used to. Her main engine was a Doxford opposed piston two stroke diesel engine. It was the size of a London double decker bus. Everything was so different. Then there was the boiler room with two large Scotch type boilers. The officers were British and the crew were from Hong Kong. The visit to the engine room was fairly brief then it was back to a cabin and lunch. One of the Junior Engineers was going on leave and he was to take his cabin. During lunch, he was told that he was on duty that night. On meeting the Second Engineer he was told he was on the 12 – 4 watch with the Third Engineer.



The 18,500 ton deadweight product tanker MV Laurelwood built in 1953 for J I Jacobs, London. Taken up by the Admiralty on a 7-year bareboat charter. With absolute minimum alterations she entered service as RFA Cherryleaf.

The ship was in for two nights, the first night he was on duty so he thought that on the second night he might go ashore in Rosyth, wrong! *Cherryleaf* was leaving at 0600, it was necessary for the main engine to be warmed through so the engineers on the 2400 – 0400 watch had to start the process – guess who had to get up early. All this new engineer could do was follow the 3rd Engineer around trying to understand what was happening. Then a shower, a short sleep before breakfast at 0830. By that time *Cherryleaf* was on its way to the next port in Trinidad – and it would take about two weeks to go there. (to be continued)

[Colin Spencer]



Your second edition of 'The newsletter' April 2020 shows a rare photo of *RFA Sandusky* leaving Malta harbour. In the background the picture shows *Senglea* and the

house where I was born. It is now being refurbished as an upmarket B&B. To sleep there again would be a dream.

If I recall correctly there were sisterships *Fort Dunvegan* and *Fort Beauharnois*. During my dockyard apprenticeship they were regular callers to Malta, named after Canadian forts, they tied up at Somerset Wharf. [John Caruana]

Ed. Thank you John, a research note on the history of the Canadian forts these ships were named after has been published on the Branch's website.

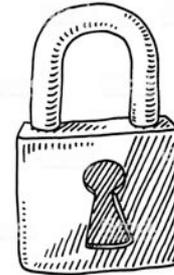


“Sparks!! I don't know which is worse, the lockdown, 007's curry or that ffo in No 7 tank!!”

Ed. 007's curry recipe was published in previous edition of The newsletter.

...from Radio 4 Extra
Her Majesty the Queen arrived at Washington DC airport on a state visit, which was eagerly awaited by newsmen from all around the world. One such newshound from a local radio station became extremely excited and this is what he said: *“Her Majesty the Queen arrives at Washington airport and will later receive a 42 Sun Galute...”*

Ed. So it's not just the current resident of DC who can't communicate in the Queen's English.



So what have you been doing during this 'lockdown'? Ballet classes! quilt making! reading those books you bought decades ago! Cooking! sorting out boxes of photographs! like our chairman 'sourcing flour and making bread'! of simply in the garden with feet up and 'glass of ***'! Let us know.

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