



## THE NEWSLETTER

of the London and Home Counties Branch – February 2021

I recounted as a so-called Early Lever, how I had left the RFA to become one of the highest paid car parking attendants in the south of England, i.e., driving ferries between Dover and Calais/Zeebugge. An advert in the Daily Telegraph appeared asking for a person with a Masters Certificate to take up a position as an oil terminal manager in Lagos. When I suggested applying, my wife thought I was mad to even consider this, as she had been a flight attendant with British Caledonian Airways, and had been to Nigeria and vowed never to return again. Anyway, to cut a long story short, I applied and was accepted, and we prepared for the great adventure. When I told my colleagues in Townsend Thoresen, they also thought I was mad, and a few, who had been with Elder Dempster Line, told me that it was so dangerous I could get killed by bandits in the first few months.

On arrival in Lagos, we were arrested by immigration officers as our yellow fever vaccinations were not valid. The vaccination only took effect ten days after receiving it and we arrived in only nine days. We were told we would be put back on the aircraft and sent back to UK, but luckily my predecessor Peter Jones, who had been waiting for us heard about it, and after a quick exchange of words and money we were free to go. Welcome to Nigeria!

Our flat had been completely refurbished, according to Peter, but it was quickly apparent that nothing much had been done, and so we had to clean up as soon as we got there, Peter made

himself scarce. Outside there were a load of empty tonic and ginger ale bottles, which my wife told out steward to get rid of. Next day we learnt Lesson No 1, you need empty bottles before you can get full ones, but luckily, they had not been disposed of, and we managed to get them back.

I should at this time elucidate that the oil was not mineral, but vegetable oil, of which Nigeria imported over 100,000 tons per annum. Until the 1960's, Nigeria had been an exporter of palm oil, but a combination of an expanding mineral oil exports and the desertification by the Sahara Desert, of the palm oil forests in the north had reduced the home-made oil so that it had to be imported. This mainly came from Malaysia, hence the oil terminal in Lagos.

Before I came, I had visions of a clean oil terminal with some palm trees scattered around. Wrong. The terminal was filthy and in a cramped part of the port, and was very hot and with a high humidity.



One of the first things I noticed was the number of employees sleeping around the terminal, when I queried this with Peter, he informed me that this was ok, because when they were required, he knew where they were, and if you chased them up, they would go and hide somewhere to sleep.

The oil was brought in usually by a Palm Line tanker, *Matadi Palm*, but with only small pipes the discharge could take a couple of days, even though the tonnage was not great. Their agency, Palm Line Agencies, was run by someone who had been at the School of Navigation with me, and also in the RNR, so David Wyatt and I got on well together.

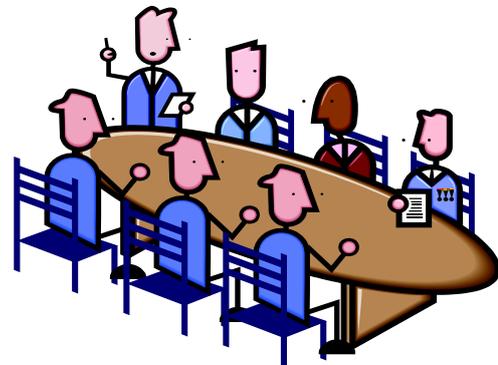


**Chairman - waiting for his next delivery of Palm Oil and pondering an agenda for our next committee meeting... whenever!**

However, the terminal was not for me, as the Lagos office was run from a building in the more salubrious part of the city. The original man had decided it was not for him and I was given the job. This entailed mainly raising letters of credit and other things which was required to purchase the oil. Now my knowledge of banking was confined to knowing what OD meant on my bank statement. Now, as they say, there is nothing a sailor can't turn his hand to, and so armed with a book on banking, I began to know about international financial trading. Of course, with Nigeria, the whole place runs on "Dash" or in other words, bribery and

corruption. This permeates everything you do, or attempt to do. For example to bring a vessel into the harbour requires a pilot, but inevitably the pilot boat has broken down, so the pilot must be given Dash, and miraculously the pilot boat has now been repaired and is ready to go.

One can go on for ever with such tales, but Nigerians are a friendly people, and Britain is still well regarded, for example UK citizens were the only foreigners who were not classed as aliens. [Peter Harrison]



## **BRANCH NEWS**

London Branch website – There is a need for someone to look after the website ([www.rfaa-London.org](http://www.rfaa-London.org)). The website is up and running and now needs someone to undertake the maintenance of its upkeep with news and other items of interest. It isn't an onerous task and if interested please let either Peter or Richard know.

For 2022 – The 2022 RFAA Reunion and AGM is to be hosted by us in the London Branch. We are reviewing venues at Chatham, Canterbury or London. More information will be forthcoming.



## ...LOOTING or PIRACY?

### alternatively ...an Armament Supply Officer's nightmare...

**Part 4 [final]** – No documents relating to the questioning of or statements made by the Master and crew of the *Upnor* have been found other than a brief but illuminating comment from the statement made by the Mate of the *Upnor*. When questioned he said that the rebels 'had been waiting to do this for three weeks'. Supporting this view, Colonel John Ward MP informed Parliament that the matter had also been widely discussed in some London clubs the week before the *Upnor* was detained. Not a good recommendation for the intelligence services of the time!

Though not all the cargo of armament stores were removed from the *Upnor* at Ballycotton, the brief list below gave some idea of the range and quantity that was in fact taken:

	Loaded	Missing
Small Arms	1,100	800
Small arms ammunition	1,443 cases	1,440
	(approximately 600,000 rounds)	
Small arm spares (cases)		266
Mixed cartridges	280 cases	243

In addition, 1,300 cases of filled shells and 750 boxes of fuses and other fireworks were removed.

The speed with which this operation was put in place would suggest skilled planning and a well motivated group of operatives. Though *Upnor's* departure date would have been common knowledge in the area, *Warrior's* return to Queenstown on the morning of 29th March could hardly have been anticipated. Quite obviously it was upon *Warrior's* availability that the whole operation depended. Is there possibly an unanswered question? Furthermore,

it is somewhat surprising that a commercial tug wishing to deliver an Admiralty message did not raise some concerns with *Upnor's* Master.

The detention of the *Upnor* on the high seas was indeed audacious, but was in the final analysis, the result of excellent intelligence, planning, co-ordination, timing and speed of execution. Nevertheless, it was an act of piracy. Surviving material in The National Archives at Kew refer to 'looting'. [Shane Redmond with thanks to Peter Robinson for his research]



## Life after the RFA...

**Part 3 – Rio de Janeiro...** The week in the hotel was good, we could relax in between visiting the office and possible apartments and finding our way around Copacabana and for me visiting the shipyard. Then there was the school for the children and offices for the official paperwork that we needed and arranging Portuguese lessons for Dorothy and I.

Our apartment was about five minutes from Copacabana beach. Traffic was very busy and driving on the wrong side of the road was difficult particularly when you had no idea where you were going or how you got back. With the apartment close to the beach we could drive along the beach until we found our road. However, driving into the office and then into the shipyard was a bit of a nightmare. After a couple of weeks, it gradually sorted itself out. Parking was different, you never parked with the hand brake on. It was very flat in Rio and parking spaces very limited so drivers would shunt the cars up and down to create a space. Road

accidents were not unusual, if there was a fatality, the body would be rolled into the gutter to await the 'dead' ambulance. The body could be there for several hours covered in newspapers!

The first Sunday in the apartment went smoothly until the evening. At about 6pm we heard what we thought was thunder and gradually it became louder. We noticed people looking out of their windows so we did the same and then the head of a procession appeared followed by a group of people singing and dancing with a band playing the drums for all they were worth. It was the local Samba School practising for the Carnival. Every Sunday they would go to the beach to practice and then mid evening they would break up by parading up Avenida Copacabana. We had to wait until the Carnival to see their costumes.

Language always presents a problem, in Brazil they spoke Portuguese but in Rio it was a form of Portuguese called Carioca, Portuguese with a very strong accent. I could speak a little French but no other language. Fortunately, my colleagues all spoke English. However, out of the office it was sign language. In the office or ship yard it was no problem but for Dorothy and shopping it was sign language. Another small problem arose in the bakery shops, where you had to go to the cashier say what you wanted, pay and then collect the items. We couldn't say what we wanted so the solution was the Dorothy would stand by the cashier once we knew what was wanted. I would then stand by the display case and point to the items. Dorothy would then hold up her fingers to indicate the number and the cashier would write down the price. After a couple of visits to the bakery it became a comedy program much to everyone's amusement. We had lessons in Portuguese which helped and after a

month we could count and speak a little which made life slightly easier.

After a couple of months in the apartment in Copacabana we moved to another, this time close to Ipanema. A nice location near a Club which we joined. The Club was enclosed such that the kids could run around and meet up with other children and we didn't have to worry. There was a good restaurant and we were able to meet up with other Brits. There was tennis and lawn bowls so life became very comfortable. The kids were learning to speak Portuguese, as children do. On one occasion we heard one child screaming at another, 'calibocca' (roughly, 'shut your mouth'). The friends we were with commented on these kids and their language and then we realised that it was one of our kids. They pick up all the words very quickly.

There was an English school in Rio and a school bus which was very good, we had to put the kids on the bus in the morning and meet them when they came home in the afternoon. The school was quite good in that whenever there was a parent/function they would lay on a bar. It brightened those evenings. The year that we were there, Prince Charles visited Rio and met the school children, our daughter was in the line meeting him, waving her flag.

**To be continued** [Colin Spencer]



### Who said that the Admiralty did not know the price of fish???

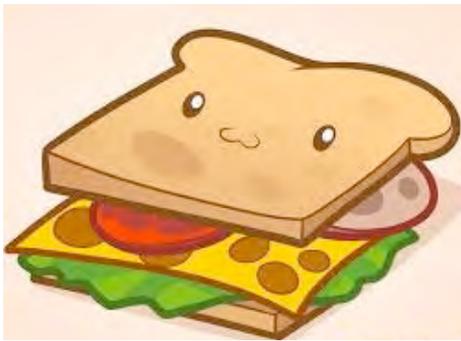
Long before fishing became an issue in EU exit negotiations – AFO2071 (June 1947) Victualling – Provision – Issuing price of sardines – supplies of sardines

are now being delivered in 4oz and 6oz and 8oz tins; these sizes should be accounted for separately by HM Victualling Yards and by HM Ships and establishments:

Issuing prices of sardines are as follows:

- 4 oz tins – .9d per tin
- 6 oz tins – 1s 1.1/2d per tin
- 8 oz tins – 1s 6d per tin

## YOUR RUEBEN SANDWICH!!



**If you are feeling a bit jaded during this lockdown but are in the mood for some comfort food that does not require too much effort, and is totally delicious, this fits the bill nicely.**

Handy if you have a sandwich maker, although don't let the lack of one put you off. This recipe makes enough for one sandwich. Make sure your meat is at room temperature, not straight from the fridge, it will help the other ingredients warm through and melt the cheese.

If you are feeling a bit lazy, forget the Russian dressing and use a slathering of mustard!

### Ingredients

*For the Russian dressing*

- 1 tbsp Mayonnaise
- 1 tbsp tomato ketchup
- 1 tsp horseradish sauce
- dash hot sauce

- dash Worcester sauce
- 1 tsp finely chopped shallot or onion
- 2 cornichon or ½ dill pickle finely chopped
- pinch hot paprika

*For the sandwich*

- 2 slices light rye bread or sourdough
- Butter, for spreading
- 2–3 slices salt beef, pastrami or corned beef
- few slices Swiss cheese, such as Emmental or Gruyère
- 2–3 tbsp sauerkraut
- salt and black pepper
- dill pickles, to serve

**Method**

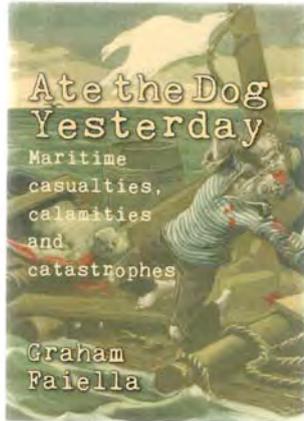
1. For the Russian dressing, mix together all the ingredients and season with salt and pepper.
2. Butter both slices of bread. Put the salt beef on one slice, then top with the cheese and sauerkraut. Spread the Russian dressing over the other slice and place it on top of the sauerkraut.
3. Heat the sandwich in a sandwich maker or in a hot, dry frying pan. (If using a frying pan, butter both sides of the bread, press the sandwich down onto the pan with a spatula, and heat for 3–4 minutes on each side until the bread is well browned and the cheese has melted.) Serve with dill pickles.

## ...Lidl Boats

Babcock the naval yard based at Rosyth and once a favourite watering hole of the RFA, has been awarded the contract to build the Type 31 Frigate for £1.25 billion - all 5 of them... The result is that they are known as the 'Lidl Boats' because they are cut price...



## A book review



### **ATE THE DOG YESTERDAY** By Graham Faiella

**511 pages, Whittles Publishing £30**  
**ISBN 978 -1-84995-089-3**

Non-Fiction

If you want to start the New Year off in style then this is the book for you! It is a compelling true-life story about mariners dreadful experiences at sea during the heyday of deep-sea commercial sail.

Did you know that in 1895 that the total number of men employed was a total of 217,794 and that the total number of deaths was 1,862 of which 990 was by drowning – I don't know what Health and Safety would say about that.

Recounted mainly as original narrative compiled from the casualties columns and pages of Lloyd's List. This book is a wealth of fascinating topics including strandings, mutiny, murder, messages in a bottle and seaquakes.

The constant dangers that deep-sea sailing ships and sailors of the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries faced were numerous and this book recounts the true-life dramas of their perils and misfortunes.

Life was tough for the sailors in sail, shipboard work was hard and routinely dangerous. Crew members were frequently killed by the sea, or by any number of dangers they faced while working their ships.

Great disasters from around the world are featured, with remarkable voyages, mutinies, hoaxes, curiosities and disease, this book has a fund of amazing tales to engross the reader.

The author Graham Faiella was formally a magazine journalist, editor and consultant and has had various educational and social history titles published, and is a member of the Society of Authors.

*A Good Read...[Ed]*



Naval recruits were ushered into a hall to hear a lecture on Keats... this was a remarkable change from normal.

The PO-in-charge of the men said in a loud voice – “You ignorant lot wouldn't know what a bleedin keats was – so listen up”. [Ed]

rfaa.london@gmail.com

<https://www.rfaa-london.org.uk>

13th edition : February 2021

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

