



## THE NEWSLETTER

of the London and Home Counties Branch

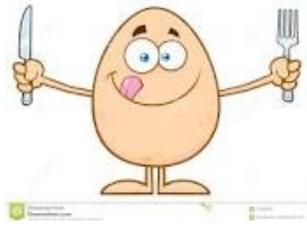
Napoleon Bonaparte was supposed to have originated the phrase that an army marches on its stomach, by which he meant that if they are fed well, then they will fight well. Sailors usually have to do very little, if any, marching but they still require food which is preferably good, or at least edible. Unlike armies which can do pillaging to augment their rations, sailors do not usually have that option, so shipborne food is a major priority for keeping everyone happy. When I joined the RFA in 1964, it was a pretty disparate organisation when it came to crewing. Except for the officers, there were British, Chinese, Maltese, and later Seychellois crews so catering standards varied enormously from ship to ship. Unlike today's RFA, crews were mainly recruited on a short-term basis, and in the case of British crews could, whilst in British ports, give 48 hours' notice to leave if they didn't like the conditions, or the captain. It would be invidious to state which nationality had the best food, and in any case, I do not wish to be sued for libel. However, I will say that on a couple of occasions I left a vessel somewhat lighter in weight than when I joined it. Of course, it is easy to criticise the chefs and their cuisine, and most people would be hard pressed to do any better, but as the old army adage used to say, *it is not the food itself, it's what you do with it*. About 50 years ago I read an article by the then General Manager of British Rail's Southern Region, in which he failed to understand why the food served in his restaurant cars was of a generally better

quality than that served on board his ferries from Dover and Folkestone. As he said considering that the cooks on the trains had very little space in which to work, compared to the galleys on the ships, the ships should have been much better. Of course, the major reason for indifferent food, must be that apart from cruise liners, budding chefs do not generally choose either the Royal or the merchant navy to learn their trade. Most would probably choose to go to a Gordon Ramsey restaurant or something similar, and in addition in those establishments they do not get seasick, or run the risk of drowning. Having said all that, on a recent visit to *RFA Lyme Bay*, I found that the food was excellent so I am pleased that the guys and girls in the present RFA can sail with full stomachs. [Peter Harrison]



**Seaman – “please ...sir do not weigh the flies otherwise my Mess gets short measure again!”**

**Purser – “...Wot!! You want hygiene with your rations? b\*\*\*\*\* off!”**



### ...RFA Menus?

Now what's on the menu today, chaps?  
What's going to support the old frame?  
Is it porridge with eggs and tomatoes,  
Or beans with a nice bit of game?

You should try the American Hash, lads,  
It's good for the brain, so they say,  
It makes you play darts all the better,  
Or puts you to bed for the day.

There's Lancashire Hot Pot for instance,  
That gives one a change playing chess,  
An Hamburgers, gravy and carrots,  
Two veg and some mustard and cress.

There's Victoria pudding and custard,  
Roast mutton and kippers and chips.  
Fired kidneys on toast with haddock,  
Macaroni and steak cut in strips.

Now all this is specially chosen  
By the Chief Steward, cook and his crew  
It's worse than a Times crossword  
puzzle  
Working out all these menus for you.

So next time you sit down to luncheon,  
And study the form on the card,  
Remember it's for five and eightpence  
And that makes you think, old pard!  
[N A McG Naval Store Journal March  
1957]



### ...you.. silly silly Billies!!

In Sembawang Naval Base there were people of various sorts from around the world and one of the delights was the annual soccer match between New Zealand and Australia. It was usually as competitive as the England v Scotland match here in the UK.

In 1964/67 Dennis Healey, the Minister of Defence, was undertaking a tour of our military establishments around the world. He was visiting the Royal Navy etc in the Far East at the time of this, soccer match, and so he and his entourage were invited to *HMS Terror* to see the game. He was seated in the VIP, area along with the Admiral and other senior officials when the Kiwis against the Aussies started. It was enjoyed by everybody and at half time the teams went inside, probably for a few 'bevvies'

Two ABs from *RFA Tidereach* had gone down to 'the village' about lunchtime for a few 'Tigers' or in their case a lot of 'Tigers' – until they were completely legless. They decided to come up to *Terror* and arrived just before half time. One of them said "Ere, let's 'av-a-laff, let's run round the pitch bleedin starker" so having discarded their clothes, off they set running round the pitch, flashing all their wobbly bits, waving to the crowd, including Dennis Healey, shouting "*Tidereach!, Tidereach!*" and chased by the Naval Police who eventually caught them and escorted them to the nearest police cells.

They were taken back to *Tidereach* to collect their gear and then onto the next flight back to the UK.

In the evening the two teams went upstairs at *Terror* and joined forces to have a very enjoyable evening of songs from their countries, enjoyed by all.

At the next football match played at *Terror* the crowd were chanting "*Tidereach! Tidereach! Tidereach!*" but unfortunately they were disappointed. There is no report as to whether Mr Healey enjoyed the entertainment provided by the RFA.  
[Deckie]

### ...Copenhagen Menu



Those of you who are familiar with Copenhagen, the waterways, the cobbled streets, the shops designed to an inch of their life... there is one beautiful restaurant called 'Noma'.

This restaurant as you will know is by the water front and for a mere £300 you can purchase a taster menu consisting of 20 courses – not one larger than a bit! This will include an egg yolk with ants, or reindeer tongue – quite a tasty dish...

Since the coronavirus things have changed at 'Noma', you could say things have changed dramatically. For on the menu now for a mere £20 you can either buy a Veggi burger or Cheeseburger... What a change!!



### ...down under with the harbour master

Port of Melbourne was embarking on a dredging programme, which I'd just done in Harwich, and also needed risk assessment experience. The UK has a very high reputation internationally, and is the first place many Australian ports look to in order to expand their gene pool.

I moved to Melbourne to start my third decade sans RFA. My second marriage didn't survive the move (keeping wives was not a skill the RFA equipped me for), so it was truly a new life. Australia is a wonderful place of opportunity, wide

open spaces and adventure, but it is very different. I've never been paid better and my money has never gone further, but the working environment is very 'corporate' and a lot more American-style cut-throat than in the UK. In Harwich I was on the board, in Australia I was two steps away from the board (on which it is most common to have no mariner at all). Everything is much more political between the States, and getting a Port Marine Safety Code in place took years and was a little like pulling teeth.

After four years in Melbourne, overseeing a successful dredging programme, I tired of the long commute from my new home in Geelong (a lovely small city just over an hour from Melbourne) and the politics of it all and resigned to go into business as a marine consultant with my new partner, a Kiwi former journalist and marketer who sold me some pilotage equipment, and came as the free set of steak knives. By then I was an Aussie citizen and could work where I wanted. I had been fast-tracked because of my specialist expertise. Since then the rules have tightened, and it's virtually impossible for a UK harbour master to get permanent residency here without forking out an amount well over six figures.

Joanna writes a killer report and we had several wonderful years on all sorts of jobs for state governments, the NZ government and maritime lawyers. One of those consultancy jobs resulted in a job offer for me at Port of Portland, near the Victoria/South Australia border. I was enticed back for a five-year stint in a fully commercial port, after being in a Trust and State-owned port. I was back to running my own pilots and port services and we had koalas in the trees, kangaroos in the back paddock and kookaburras in the power lines. Plus, the occasional highly poisonous snake! True blue rural Australia.

I tried retiring after Portland, but was asked to go help out at TasPorts in Tasmania for a while. I was offered the HM job there, but the place is in a legislative mess and the job of HM of my home port, Geelong, came up so I took that instead. I've now been Harbour Master for all three main ports in the state of Victoria! It's an easy job as it's only a channels authority, and in about a year, at the age of 69, I will try to call it quits again.

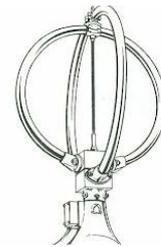
Australia is truly the land of plenty and I'm happy to stay here forever, but you do pay for it in the working environment, which can be very stressful. It is very common to move jobs as much as I have done, which may be a reflection of that.

The RFA is very well regarded here. My predecessor in Melbourne was Gary Wilson, ex RFA, who also worked in Queensland and Western Australia before heading back home due to the tougher immigration laws. He was followed by Roy Stanbrook, who remained in Melbourne until Christmas, when he retired (also tired of the politics) to live on his daughter and Aussie son-in-law's farm out of Melbourne. He's as happy as a sand boy tending his bees and his huge orchard and veggie patch, some highland cattle, a few donkeys and a pony, and Joanna and I visit when we need some country air.

Harbour Masters have biennial international conferences all around the world, and Joanna and I have had some wonderful trips, where I catch up with old friends and have a great time. These have been cancelled for now anyway, so there's little to miss by bowing out and enjoying all this wonderful weather we have here. A special time of note was when Joanna and I married in true Aussie style about four years ago. It was an outside wedding and included a picnic at Hanging Rock. Your editor came down

to reprise his earlier role as my best man and fellow RFA alumni Roy Stanbrook and Robin Bourne, who works for Maritime Victoria, were present, along with family and friends from the UK and NZ. We wound up with a Jamaican BBQ in our back garden, which is no doubt where Richard swiped the Curried Goat recipe I saw in a previous newsletter.

On a final little side note, when I arrived in Australia there was only one member of Trinity House in Australia, an old chap called George McCathie, who lived locally. When Roy arrived there were three and since George's death, it can be said that the RFA has provided all members of Trinity House in Australia! [Dave Shennan]



**DO NOT PAINT Me!!!**

**...first Tripper's Bellini-Tosi**

It takes me back to early 1972 having completed my radar certificate at Norwood after the gruelling MRGC. We were the first batch of students to take the course and then most went to sea in late January.

I joined the RFA with a college friend of mine Pete Allen, when we were told to attend a Sight-and-Sound typing course in London, just off Oxford Circus. We were surrounded by dolly birds (I don't know whether that is politically correct anymore, but they were!) being the only two blokes on the course.

I thought then that the RFA has just got to be the right outfit for me, sending two young newly qualified chaps to join a sea of young girls... what could possibly go wrong?

When one morning, totally out of the blue the receptionist at Sight and

Sound, who resembled, no I say was Hattie Jacques, pounced on Pete and myself and said:

*“Mr Fernley, Mr Allen, could you please contact this number”*

It was the MOD with details of ships for us to join, and I was off to *RFA Stromness* in Durban and Pete off to *RFA Tidespring* in Singapore.

Well we couldn't believe our luck to be flying out to join these ships, attached to a fleet of 50 RFAs scattered across the globe which were stationed with the RN fleet.

I was jabbed up, kitted out and the final humiliation of having a haircut. You must remember this was the early 70's when long hair was sported by all, well except our tutors and the staff of the MOD and RFA!

I flew out on a snowy Sunday afternoon from Heathrow and eventually arrived at Durban in South Africa, and the realisation that this ship was basically a floating gin palace and that my liver would be doing most of the workload on this trip.

We eventually sailed for Mombasa five days later, with me having little sleep, too much to drink and only one fleeting visit to the radio room.

With the demise of the Radio Officer and the creation of the Systems Engineer (cross between a Sparky and a Lecky) ranks, colours and titles have all changed.\*

Now back to my first ship, and the senior Radio Officer A was taking me around the ship pointing out various antennae, as the ship boasted UHF, VHF, naval transmission whip aerials, plus the standard Marconi shack assemblage, when we came across the MF Direction Finder - Ballini-Tosi.

I cringe at the thought of it now, some 55 years later, but I couldn't resist the following conversation:

RO A – *Here we have the Ballini-Tosi aerial with the auxiliary wire aerial for*

*the receiver, and I am sure you have done work on this at college?*

JRO – Full of Bull and total lack of experience!

*Yes I have done the Ballini-Tosi till I was sick of the sight of it, but shouldn't the base of the loops be insulated and not painted over like this one!*

Out of the mouths of the innocent, and the problem is I was right, but what I hadn't taken into account was tact, diplomacy and the deference to my senior officer.

Oh how he must have reported me to the SRO – imaginary conversation: *“Fred, we've got a right little bloody know-all sent straight from college here! 12 to 4 for him I think.”*

I would now like to take this opportunity to thank all those senior Radio Officers who put up with the likes of me, as without their help and understanding I wouldn't have got passed the breakwater. [Richard Fernley]



*“and is that really Gibraltar?”*

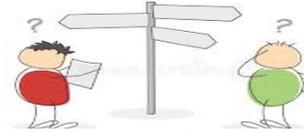
*“it certainly is Madam”*

*“Thank you so much...I understand that when we land there I much on no account miss seeing the rock”*

Over fifty years ago, an RFA general cargo ship was berthed in Gibraltar alongside the Tower, she was returning to Chatham from Singapore. As was usual work on the loading of the vessel had been completed for the day at 1700 (GMT?), and was expected to be finished the following day. Three cadets had been ashore for the evening savouring the delights of Gibraltar, and

returned to the ship at about 2200. For whatever reason the subject of the admiral's flag that was flying from the Tower came up for discussion, and maybe it would make a good souvenir. Of course, courage was bolstered by several beers, though as good cadets we were not drunk. Compared to today getting into the building was very easy, doors to the various offices were all open, including the admiral's, which we inspected and found in good order. However, when we reached the top of the Tower, the entrance to the roof was a hatch that was padlocked. We returned to the ship empty handed, but a little disappointed. In the bar the Third Officer berated us and said that RFA cadets should not be deterred by a little padlock. In view of that, the engineer cadet obtained a hacksaw and, as we had all seen robbery films, a bar of soap to keep down the noise of the sawing. We returned to the Tower and commenced cutting, one of us kept watch for the roving police patrols, but only once did we have to stop for one of them. Considering it was only a relatively small padlock and, unlike in the movies, it was surprising how long it took to saw through it, but perseverance paid off and we emerged onto the roof. The admiral's flag was fully illuminated, and as we hauled it down, we felt the whole of Gibraltar was probably watching. Taking it back to the ship, the Third Officer congratulated us, and promised to keep his mouth shut (probably not). The next day, once the alcoholic bravado had worn off, we waited with some trepidation for the missing flag to be noted. Surprisingly, it was not until about 1000 that police cars rolled up, and the flag was replaced. Luckily for us we sailed at 1200, and nobody on board said anything about our saga, although the biggest mystery was what happened to the flag? It was never seen us again, but the suspicion was directed at the Master, and

obviously we could not ask him, as in theory he knew nothing about it. [Anon]  
*"...indeed Madam and if you see RFA Cadets with the Admiral's flag... shout BZ! and ...run!"*



### **...Lost and Found**

In our previous edition, former London Branch chairman Stan McCabe in the even earlier role of a 'well-oiled' 21 year old junior engineer on *RFA Tideflow* referred to fellow engineer Dave Etheridge.

Stan says "Dave paid a memorable part in my life. It was during the trip, somewhere on the Indian Ocean, and over a can of beer, that I told him of the girl I had left behind, and for whom I still hankered. Dave convinced me that, when we got back to Rosyth, I should "get off my backside" and do something about it.

I did and here we are, about to celebrate 60 years of marriage. I think we shall toast the occasion in rum and, if I knew where Dave was now, he would be the guest of honour.

So, Dave Etheridge, if you read this please get in touch!!!" [via editor]

### **Admiralty Pub meeting**

Our planned meeting at the *Admiralty Pub* in Trafalgar Square penciled in for Wednesday 15th July has sadly, for obvious reasons, been erased from our diary. Hopefully we can all meet there later in the year.

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