



THE NEWSLETTER

of the London and Home Counties Branch – October 2020



One of the hazards of being at sea, is falling ill or being injured when carrying out your work. Needless to say, one cannot dial 999 and call for an ambulance, so ships are to a certain extent reliant upon themselves. If the vessel is comparatively close to shore a helicopter is usually available to take the casualty ashore. However, this is not always possible if the it is in the middle of the Pacific Ocean or the nearest country does not have a helicopter capable of carrying out such evacuation.

The rules for UK registered ships are quite straight forward in that any vessel carrying more than 100 persons on an international voyage of more than 72 hours must carry a medical practitioner (also known as the “ships doctor”).

Nowadays carrying a doctor is does not apply for most of the worlds merchant ships, cruise liners apart. A lot of RFA’s have, and still do, carry over 100, or quite close to that number, and so a doctor is required. In the past

we all know that such a person was usually a retired GP, who was happy to swan around the world getting paid to administer to alcoholic, or VD afflicted sailors. But there were still a lot of vessels which did not carry nearly 100 and hence someone had to be nominated to be the ships doctor. Some took this quite seriously, wandering around the vessel looking for ill sailors. Others (I include myself) were not so keen, indeed when volunteers were called for, most found that they were far too busy to do such additional work. My first “consultation” was an injured engineer who was bleeding quite badly from the head, but when the blood was cleaned up, it was only a small cut, and a bit of plaster was all that was required. Another, albeit in Portland, came to show me his waterworks which were clearly in a similar state to the photographs in the *Ship Master’s Medical Guide** of a VD victim. He couldn’t believe my prognosis because ‘she was a really nice girl’, however I persuaded him to go to Dorchester hospital for treatment. The *Ship Master’s Medical Guide* (in RFA/RN language BR36) was, and still is, one of the best books available to assist people at sea and has probably saved many lives.

Of course, the stories of people carrying out operations on the chart table with a pair of dividers and a bent spoon are probably just that. Nowadays RFAs carry a well-trained Medical Technician, who is no longer a heavy drinking 85 year old, and some of them

are regular RN personnel. So, it is good for today's sailors that they can call upon proper medical help, and not have to rely on people like me. [Peter Harrison]



Please overlook our opening photograph to this piece of literature ...as this one has been acquired - at the last minute - from an old photo album and reportedly is our Chairman in full rig for conducting his voluntary duty as the 'ship's doctor' ...thankfully we now have MedTechs!!!

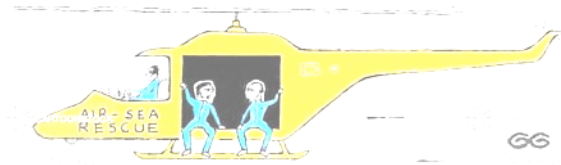
COMRFA



Congratulations to David Eagles on his appointment as the next Commodore. David takes up his appointment, from Commodore Duncan Lamb, at the end of October under the official title of:

Commodore Royal Fleet Auxiliary and Deputy Director Royal Navy Afloat Support.

...buzzy bees with deck space and ear defenders –



'WE'VE TO SEARCH FOR A DR. FOSTER IN GLOUCESTER.'

Today we take it for granted – our county air ambulance, our police observer and the coastguard SAR machine. Added to this you're no longer an RFA if you don't have that flat platform on your tail. But when did that all begin? The following is an extract from an Admiralty press release from January 1951 entitled 'Helicopter trials in mid-channel'.

"Helicopters may be based on merchant ships to defend convoys against submarines following on trials now being carried out in the English channel. Instead of having a light carrier with every convoy, one or more merchant ships can be fitted up with a special flight deck for helicopters. The helicopters will then take-off direct to search sea-lanes near the convoy for submarines which have crept past long range shore based search aircraft. The development of helicopters to completely take over this search and strike work has been forecast by Vice Admiral M Mansergh, the Fifth Sea Lord.

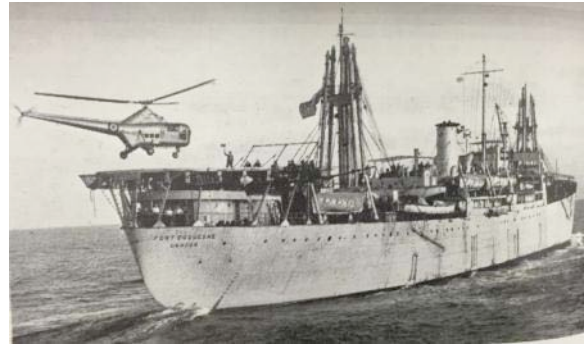
The trials are being carried out on board the 9,788 ton fleet supply ships *RFA Fort Duquesne* with Westland S51 helicopters flown by pilots from Gosport and Culdrose. A specially strengthened steel platform has been fitted up above the deck at the stern of the ship, clear of all rigging.

The helicopter can, of course, hover over a small area and land in space about its own size. In fact, on *Fort Duquesne* it lands in a space less than its own size. The whirling rotor blades,

with their span of about 50 feet, actually overhang parts of the flight platform.

For the take-off, the pilot starts up his engine and rises off the platform in the normal way. During the flight he keeps in touch with the ship by radio. When landing, the pilot brings the machine down to within about 20 feet off the stern of the ship and hovers above the platform. He then slowly lowers it to the ground, directed by the 'controller' who stands on the platform and use two flags to guide him in. At present the deck is covered with netting to prevent the helicopter from sliding across it. When not in use, the helicopter is 'anchored' to the flight platform.

It takes considerable skill to bring an aircraft in on a small platform which is rolling and dipping in rough seas, but naval pilots have quickly mastered the difficulties. Valuable lessons have been learnt in the trials. The captain of *Fort Duquesne* (Capt T Elford RFA) has taken his 11-knot ship* out in fair weather off Portland and also in heavy seas and high winds. It has proved possible to land a helicopter when the deck is pitching and rolling as such as 10 to 20 feet at a time. The pilots have also flown in varying winds; gusts blow up the side of the ship and across the deck and hit the aircraft as it hovers above the platform. Gusts of wind also flex the long slender rotor blades about when they are turning at very low speeds. On these particular trials a temporary canvas screen has been fitted up around the forward part of the platform to protect it against the wind. But even lack of wind has its effect – the pilot may find it difficult to hover immediately above the platform – which, from 20 feet in the air above it, looks none too big. There is also the problem of maintenance and petrol supply during long periods at sea.



Further trials are going to be carried out in still rougher weather. Meanwhile all the lessons learnt in nearly 200 flights from *Fort Duquesne* will be assimilated and passed on to other pilots in training at the Naval Helicopter Station at Gosport.” [Tom Adams]

*only if running with the tide and a heavy tail wind.

[ED: The crystal ball did not have *Medievac* in the frame and it took a decade before the first RFAs were designed from scratch to have the deck, hangar and culture change.]



Cadets are aboard to learn... but they can also teach...

...when I was a Cadet and we'd had a fire exercise one afternoon after which all the gear had to be stowed away. The Deck Boy came to me clutching this brass item and told me that he had found this *nostril* lying on the deck and didn't know where it was supposed to go and asked what I could suggest. I told him to wander around the ship and to inspect everyone's face very closely to see who was missing one to which his reply is unprintable! He soon learnt the difference between a *nostril* and a *nozzle* though [Annon]



...letter from a Film Officer

The ship I was on was preparing to make its way out to Hong Kong and the ship was in uproar... with supplies being delivered daily, and the ship itself being made ready for this epic voyage, as we were to go via the Cape because the Suez canal was still closed.

We were based at Marchwood military port on Southampton water, and a Royal Naval tilley (mini bus) arrived for me to make the trip to Portsmouth naval base, on the other side, to collect top secret coding material and other basic supplies, plus a selection of films for the trip.

On leaving Marchwood I came face-to-face with the Old Man who said: *“When you collect the allocation of films, make sure you bring back a new film – don’t come back onboard without one!”*

At the Naval Base the first stop for me was the communication centre to collect the cryptographic material plus the hydrographical data and signals. I then made my way to the Royal Naval Film Corporation to make my choice of films for the trip. You must remember that this was in the days of celluloid film (16mm) and a film was normally three reels long, held in a steel canister. These reels were loaded onto a Bell & Howell projector, and with all the bits and pieces it weighed a ton – we hadn’t yet adopted the tonne.

The news I was presented with was not what I wanted to hear, because I was told that a nuclear submarine had taken all the new films bar one. I presented our ships programme, which

was a confidential document and ‘hand of officer only’.

The RNFC had been wiped clean... just a few *Carry On’s* and the usual cowboy suspects left on the shelves. I grabbed the new film and made up my selection with the remaining *Carry on’s*, war films and cowboy spectaculars. We were going to be six weeks away on this trip, and that meant collecting three films per week for six weeks.

I loaded my meagre offering onto the tilley van and headed off to Southampton and the wrath of the Old Man. We arrived and I offloaded the films in the locker allocated, only to be confronted by the Old Man. *“Well he said – did you get a new film” “Oh yes!”* I said quite truthfully, and carried on with loading up the locker with the films and cautiously wrote our film programme, to be issued once we had departed.

We sailed on a grey, rainy afternoon and made our way down the Southampton Water and a hard starboard at the Isle of Wight. The routine soon set in and we made our way Far East. The film programme had been typed and issued to all messes when the bombshell hit! In amongst all the Cowboy and War films was my new film and it was *“Beatrix Potter: the Ballet”*.

The response was amazing. The officer’s mess voted in unison not to attend and their actual response cannot be printed in this newsletter! The Petty Officer’s mess was even more earthy and certainly could not even be written on a toilet wall. But the Seaman’s mess took the film to their hearts and watched it to the end.

I received a deputation at my cabin when the stewards requested they saw the it again, so the film was viewed many times.

I was confronted by the Old Man later on in the trip who tried to admonish me about the film when I told him of my

great success and that the crew's mess would agree. [Fred Hitchcock]



...do you recall the Beira Bucket??
...calling all Beira Patrol Lads
...well a trip to Mombasa is being planned for next year! This trip will include flights to and from London Heathrow to Nairobi and then down to Mombasa. A trip to the Sunshine Club (without wives) and then a safari thrown in to Tsavo Park. We anticipate this costing about £1,000 per head. If you are interested then please let our Branch Sec know...

...as we have been referring to medicine and helicopters...



RFA Argus is currently busy providing humanitarian aid (and anti-drug surveillance) in the hurricane waters of the Caribbean. Flying-the-Flag as the Navy's Primary Casualty Receiving Ship/Air Training Ship she reflects the state-of-the-art medical and aviation provision provided by the RFA. BZ to them all.



The following has been received from the RFAA National Chairman:
"With the current COVID19 restriction in place it is now apparent that the AGM and Renion Dinner cannot take place in the normal way and is very regrettably **Cancelled**.

In order to meet the Charity Commission's requirement the AGM will be achieved by electronic means. The mechanism, for which, will be advised to those who indicated they would attend in person to cast their ballots. Those who have sent their postal ballot need do nothing. The annual reports will be available on our website.

Those who indicated that they would have attended the dinner will receive a separate email."

ooOOOoo

As the Government appears to be pushing tighter 'lock-down rules' upon us – Keep Safe – but never let it be said that we in London and the Home Counties are not optimistic...



Christmas lunch (2020)!

Our next planned meeting is Christmas Lunch at the *Admiralty Pub* in Trafalgar Square – penciled in for Noon on Wednesday 9th December. The Menu is reproduced on next page. Yes – a little early to book ... but more on this later.

rfaa.london@gmail.com
<https://www.rfaa-london.org.uk>
9th edition : October 2020

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

CHRISTMAS PARTY MENU

STARTERS

Fuller's London Porter smoked salmon, pickled beetroot, horseradish & toasted Golden Pride sourdough (df)
Chicken liver parfait, red onion chutney, toasted brioche, brandy jelly
Curried roasted romanescosoup, raita, shallot bhaji (vg/gf)
Wild mushrooms, fried duck egg, truffle, walnuts, Brussels sprouts (v/gf/df)
Asahi tempura tiger prawns, garlic crouton, sweet & sour sauce (df)

MAINS

Usk Vale turkey breast, chestnut & apricot stuffing, pigs in blankets, gravy, cranberry & mandarin jam (gf)
Gressingham duck leg, tarka dhal, raita (gf)
Salmon en croûte, Chablis cream sauce
Shortcrust pie of braised Hampshire venison bourguignon & parsnip
Baked cumin carrot & wild carrot mousse, rainbow chard & beetroot tarte, macadamia nut & toasted Golden Pride sourdough crumbs (vg/df)
Served with sharing plates of roast potatoes & a selection of seasonal vegetables (v)

PUDDINGS

Fuller's Black Cab Christmas pudding, Fuller's brandy butter ice cream
Rhubarb savarin cheesecake, clotted cream shortbread, Fuller's chocolate ice cream (gf)
Poached berries, yuzu gel, hazelnut crumb (vg/gf/df)
Speckled bread & butter pudding, crème anglaise & Fuller's vanilla ice cream
Set milk chocolate parfait, raspberries, honeycomb & Fuller's raspberry sorbet (gf)

2 course £33pp 3 course £39pp



Overheard

“Grandpa ...has this rule-of-six got anything to do with Cricket?”

“...no son no more than it has to do with 600 metres.”

“...600 metres Grandpa? Is that a race?”

“...ahh laddie you could say that ...it's the old five-ton distress band and yes could be interpreted as a race-against-time.”

“As I see it grandpa... it does have to do with Cricket ...we are all on a sticky Wicket!”