



## THE NEWSLETTER

of the London and Home Counties Branch – March 2021

I was recently clearing out some old files and came across my notes for Masters Certificate (Class 1 in new money), and was interested by the notes for Magnetism. This subject was, even in the 1970's, a total irrelevance to modern shipping, however the magnetic compass in its binnacle was a requirement for all vessels, and proudly sat on the monkey island in with its red and green Balls (Quadrantal correctors) in case an officer forgot which was port or starboard. As a DTI surveyor said to me, "it is the only reliable piece of equipment in the ship". In London we were taught by the doyen of magnetism, Captain Klinkert, who admitted to us that it was the only subject in the curriculum that was totally forgotten once the exam was passed. Like so many, I thought that working out the variation of a vessel in London, and what it would be on arrival in Sydney, only confirmed Captain Klinkert's opinion. Some of the magnets in the binnacle were usually missing, as they were ideal presents for people's children to play with when daddy came home. And of course, who can forget compass swinging, when the ship came out of refit.

In the RFA the course was not completely wasted, as we still had a class of vessels that were completely reliant for navigating purposes on the magnetic compass, namely the *Eddy* class of ships. A class of tankers that were obsolescent, if not actually obsolete, by the time the first of eight was built in 1951. By the 1960s only

*Eddyfirth* remained. Some readers will have served in them, and some may actually have commanded one, so forgive me if I get some of the details wrong.



*She was the only one of the class to survive to be granted a badge in 1977. Her heraldic description wasn't particularly magnetic - Black, standing on a triangular base apex downward charged throughout with a gurge white and blue a horse white with head lowered and sinister hind leg raised.*

As Admiralty designed, they had a citadel and the accommodation was not too bad, but a previously mentioned they had no automatic pilot or gyro compass. She did however have a 25ft motor cutter, but the last time it was used was some time ago, and it was fairly rotten we discharged it to Portsmouth Dockyard.

When loaded the tank deck was virtually awash in moderate seas, and its speed with triple expansion steam engines was 12 knots – down hill and with the wind behind it. But I suppose compared to the then *Fort* class it was a racing machine. I recall going from Invergordon to Old Kilpatrick on the Clyde that we had to time our approach

to the Pentland Firth, to the north of Scotland, to make sure we had the tide with us, if not we would go backwards.

*Eddyfirth* was fitted to carry Avcat, which meant when empty, the tanks were ballasted with seawater. As Avcat and seawater are an anathema to aircraft as the water has an annoying habit of freezing and hence blocking the fuel lines. To avoid this after discharging the ballast, and before loading the fuel, the tanks had to be completely dried. This entailed everyone, including the Captain, going into the tanks and drying them with cloths, something that was not a particularly popular pastime. During my time we did several runs from Fawley oil refinery in Southampton Water, to Gosport. These 'voyages' coincided with Cowes week, and after having dodged several yachts, in a fit of annoyance I decided to stand on for the next one. The abuse was well worth it, amongst other phrases implying that my mother and father were not married was that I should put my 'L' plates up. *RFA Eddyfirth* remained in service until 1981, so it did a good job for the RFA and for the RNSTS and reminded deck officers to keep looking at the variation and deviation tables. [Peter Harrison]



***RFA EDDYFIRTH* distinctive with her high poop, mushroom ventilators, very low freeboard and prominent rubbing strake. A less visible unique feature on some of her sisterships was a telescopic arrangement on the foremast to comply with Manchester Ship Canal requirements.**



### **Life after the RFA...**

**Part 4 – Rio de Janeiro...** One had to be careful in Rio, particularly in the evening. There was a going rate to be mugged, if you carried less than about 15 USD you were in trouble then if you carried much more you were in trouble! One had to be careful. The next beach to Copacabana was Ipanema, a friend of ours lived near that beach. On Sunday mornings he would take his towel and go to the beach to sun bathe and watch the people playing volley ball. With some bikini clad players, it certainly made the game more interesting. One morning a pretty young lady spread her towel on the sand a few yards in front of him. Dressed in a bikini she proceeded to rub herself with sun tan oil and then she stood up and did some stretching exercises, touching toes etc. After a quarter of an hour she did more exercises and then picked up her towel and wandered off. After all this exercise our friend was exhausted and in need of a cigarette. He had been using his shorts as a pillow ... put his hand behind him for his trousers – no trousers! The girl's accomplice had taken his trousers. The problem was his house keys were in his trousers. He then had to go home and explain to his wife how he had lost his trousers. They had to arrange for someone to come and change the lock on his door before any burglars arrived.

I used to enjoy going to the supermarket on a late Sunday afternoon. My wife and kids would do the shopping and I would have a coffee. In the supermarket there was a stall where you could taste the various coffee and enjoy the scenery. It frequently happened that a young bikini-clad lady would need some things to take home

for the evening meal after spending the day on the beach. It certainly made shopping more interesting, the coffee tasted better as well!



*“...we though about censoring this but did not wish to upset the photographer/author (or you readers) so here is the local scenery.”*

Carnival time came during our stay in Rio. We went to the main parade, what a fantastic experience with the parade, floats, music and singing. It would start about 9pm and finish about 5am. We couldn't take the children so we had to organise a baby sitter. The evening started with dinner at a churrascaria, a special restaurant. The meal was a set charge and included starter, main course and dessert, drinks were extra. The waiters were wandering around with trays of food or swords of meat. The meat had been impaled onto a sword and you could have whatever you wanted or how many pieces you wanted. The first time I visited one of these restaurants I didn't eat for nearly a day afterwards. The meat was excellent. We use to go to a small restaurant near our flat, we would choose one main dish, if you ordered meat there was always two portions, ie two steaks, or two chops, or two chicken breasts!



The time flew by and so the job in Rio was coming to an end, the first ship had been delivered just after I arrived and the second was nearing completion twelve months later. We decided that Dorothy and the kids had to go home at the beginning of September for the start of school in the UK. The second ship wouldn't be finished for another six weeks. I would return on the completion of the second vessel. As one can imagine the kids were very excited. They were bundled into the car complete with all their suitcases. The car was based on a German model with the boot in the front and the engine in the rear. We arrived at the airport followed by a certain amount of chaos. Unload the kids, the cases, find a trolley, where to check in etc. At last they were checked in and passed through to the departure lounge, leaving me to go back to an empty flat feeling rather miserable. I parked the car in the apartment car park and checked the car and the boot. OH NO! There was one suitcase in the boot. In the confusion we had left one case in the boot. No mobile telephones in those days. When Dorothy arrived in London, they were one case short. After discussion with the airline they realised that it hadn't been checked in. I phoned Dorothy the next day, problem more or less solved.

A few weeks later when I came to fly home, I had one case too many, weight wise. After discussions with the airline this was resolved. The next problem came when I arrived at Gatwick. There was another baggage-handlers' strike and no trolleys! I couldn't carry all the bags/suitcases and so had to move some cases ten yards or so and then go back for the rest until I eventually reached the Greeting Area where

Dorothy and her father were waiting and could help. A good ending to an exceptional year.

**To be continued** [Colin Spencer]



“... until now, I never understood why you got so excited when someone walked past the house...!”

## I do recall...

Walking down Canute Road, to numbers 19/23, the Shipping Federation, feeling pretty good. I had just done 5 months on a 'skin-boat' working for Elders & Fyffes, so I felt that I was now a British Seaman.

Arriving at the building, the doors were multiple choice entry, either 'Established' or 'Non-Established', didn't really matter as it was basically one longish room with a counter running full length, facing a row of blackboards with ships names and required ratings etc.

This was all new to me, so I just walked up to the nearest counter person and asked about a ship, he immediately wanted to know if I was established, my response, "whats that?" to which he replied "are you on a contract to a shipping company?". I told him that I wasn't and was immediately sent to the other end of the room which was for the 'non-established' seafarer.

There was a smaller blackboard there, with my last ship on it, another ship that I cannot recall and *RFA Tidesurge*. Seems that no one wanted the RFA, and the person behind the counter said that I should take the *Tidesurge*, I asked him what it was and was told that it was

a tanker and it was in Portland.

With the necessary paperwork I was off. What a wake up. Got to Portland Naval Base, first surprise, paperwork checked by police and then my ride delivered me to the jetty. Second surprise, the ship was painted grey, with big numbers on the side 'A98', I didn't know that I was joining the navy!

Paperwork and signing on were done and I was guided to my shared cabin, George was my cabin mate and a great friend he was on that trip, there were six of us catering boys, Alistair Firth (Dimples) who was a real character, George Malcolm and the only other name I remember was Patrick (Pat) who really did like a drink or two, on paying off the vessel. He managed to have a few drinks on the train and ended up pulling the train's communication cord, three times!

Luckily, my train was going in another direction, but I still got delayed when I arrived home as the street outside the station, was crowded with hundreds of people shouting "We want Mick" outside the Court House, where Mick Jagger was facing charges of public indecency, for something that he had done at our local garage.

But I digress... once I was settled in and met the cook, I was to be the galley boy (well, I was experienced)! The cook was a Maltese chap -- Emmanuel DeGiorgio (pronounced Dejojo). The galley was on the poop deck and built around the ammunition tube of what was once a deck gun, where the gun had been was now a sun deck for the PO's bar. This same deck was also used to show films when we were on the Beira Patrol, with the screen mounted on the vertrep platform. One of the films shown was Bond, 'You Only Live Twice', this was only remembered, as the Captain and the Chief Engineer came to watch as well. That night was one that almost got cancelled, as, during the show, the funnel tubes were

blown with much soot and debris landing on all who were there, including the drinks.



**“...ahh Davie lad... you should have joined her before the Bos’un learnt to read. ‘Cause when he did he found an old ‘62 Circular Letter and religiously painted up her number...on both sides”**

Films were usually shown in the respective bars, Officers in their bar/lounge PO's in the messroom or bar, shown by Ray-the-Yeoman. He had a habit of pinching out his dog-ends and placing the un-used bit for later, behind his ear. He had a good mop of curly hair, which (yes! you've guessed) sometimes there would be a cloud of smoke coming from this mop, where the ciggie-butt had failed to be extinguished.

The crew would usually show our films in the bar, which was a bit tight sometimes. There was one occasion where we were jam packed in to watch a good film, the A/C had broken down so it was rather humid. At the end of the film, where the deck was sloping outwards, there was a puddle of collected perspiration two inches deep at the outward side.

We had so many films to watch that trip, we were taking out, new stock for the Far East Fleet.

The galley had an oil-burner stove and it was a nasty piece of equipment, each Sunday afternoon, there was a buffet type meal in the afternoon, while the deck or engine dept, swept the chimneys of more soot.

I still remember turning to, one afternoon to see a flame thrower type flame shooting out of one of the ignition holes on the front of the range, this was stopped by Assistant Cook Ray Walker, who just closed the hatch of the hole

carefully, using a serving spoon to push it from a safe distance. I also remember Ray turning up with his whites covered in that soot, where there had been a blow-back when he was lighting up the stoves for the days work.

Back to the present, my first working day was another surprise, a warship had just come into the harbour and fired one of the big guns, obviously a blank, but there and then, I thought that the RFA was going to be fun! Odd what conclusions you arrive at when you're young. **to be continued**  
[David the Galley]

### **Impressing the Boss...**

We were alongside in a UK port and were due to spend the Christmas and New Year periods there. As usual, the ship's company were split down the middle with half proceeding home for a few days over Christmas and the other half did the same at New Year. I had Christmas off and duly returned to the ship for New Year. One of the other New Year inmates was a first trip Deck Cadet who was obviously as green as grass. I told him a couple of days before New Year that it was a tradition that the youngest Officer on board had to stand up and give a dissertation to the other Officers during the New Year's Day lunch. Well the poor Cadet nearly had cardiac arrest at the mere thought of having to do this and he asked me what his talk was supposed to be about. I said that he should research an interesting topic and then build a speech around it, not making it too long as people would get bored and would start banging the table with spoons and conversely not making it too short as people would think he wasn't taking things seriously enough and would start a slow hand clap.

Well Cadet Blogs got himself into quite a state and pleaded with me to give him some ideas. I told him that the Captain would be on board for New Year and

that he most probably had a hobby like stamp collecting or model railways or whatever and that the Cadet would impress him enormously if he made that hobby the subject of his dissertation. The Cadet enquired if I knew what the Old Man's hobby was and I said no, but suggested that the young man himself popped along to the Old Man's cabin to make enquiries. Well that suggestion nearly resulted in further trauma, but to give him his due, off he went somewhat hesitantly and knocked at the Old Man's door which was just down the alleyway from my cabin. At the imperious "Come" the Cadet went in shaking like a leaf in the august presence and asked the Old Man if he had a hobby. The Old Man was somewhat taken aback and bemused at this and asked why the Cadet wanted to know at which he replied that it would be the subject of his speech. The Old Man asked "What speech?" and the Cadet replied "the traditional one that I have to make as he youngest Officer aboard". The Old Man enquired "Who told you that this was a tradition" to which the Cadet replied "the Second Officer". The next thing I knew was the Cadet knocking at my door and saying "the Captain wants to see you NOW!".

I assumed that it was not an invitation to coffee and biscuits!!! [Annon]



**"...sit down Mate. I'm convinced this 'new' tradition of YOURS should actually be inaugurated by you... subject ...celestial navigation in the Sargasso... during the hurricane season ...will that suit you?"**

**... draughtsmanship, engineering, grammar etc etc**

A hot topic in the media is concern about the education of children. Totally

ignoring the fact that much of our knowledge and great inventions were from times before universal education...  
 ...the charts drafted by Cook and other great navigators;  
 ...radio even before Marconi;  
 ...steam propulsion before the 'infernal' combustion engine;  
 ...the Naval Service before the 'Crabs';  
 ...ohh...and coal RASed before oil;  
 ...so let's add our bit into the mix...  
 punctuation!!!



**Summary of signal received from the RFAA National Chairman**

"Owing to the current COVID19 situation it has been decided to cancel the AGM/Dinner date set for May.

We are navigating for a suitable date in October or failing that, early December. In view of this the 'Members' Yearbook' will not be mailed out until a date can be confirmed. We will let you know when there is a firm plan."

**RFA NEWS... historical milestone**

February 2021... first female Master. Congratulations to Captain Susan Cloggie-Holden RFA on taking up her appointment as Commanding Officer *RFA Tiderace*.

rfaa.london@gmail.com

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

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