



THE NEWSLETTER

of the London and Home Counties Branch – April 2021



Having passed my Second Mates Examination (at first attempt), I was looking forward to being appointed to some ship in Singapore, where I had heard that it was one long Ban Yan. However, the MOD decided that somewhere closer to home was the place for me. My first appointment as a Third Officer was to go and standby the building of *RFA Engadine*, at Messrs Henry Robb shipbuilders in Leith. I suppose that relatively few of us have had the experience of watching a ship being built, so although I wanted the Far East, I actually was given the Far North. *Engadine* was of course a new type of vessel for the RFA, and hence we were regularly visited by people from 'the Madhouse' as well as from Bath. The Master was Captain Bonshaw Irwin, the Chief Officer was James Baily, First Officer was Peter Homan and the Second Officer David Pursall and we lived in a bed and breakfast in Edinburgh and took the bus in the morning to go down to Leith. I was given the job of making up the planned maintenance book, something of which I knew next to nothing about, as planned maintenance was a virtually new thing

for the RFA. In hindsight, I don't think anyone else had much of an idea either.

In those days (and maybe nowadays as well) subsistence allowance was given at a high rate for the first three weeks, after which the MOD assumed that you had found somewhere cheaper to live. For the RFA officers, living there permanently, we were always on the low rate, but not the civil service people from Bath. After three weeks they always found a reason to go back to their offices for consultation, returning after a few days, and hence once again starting on the high rate. Nice work if you can get it.

I had never been to Edinburgh before, so I enjoyed myself in the evenings and weekends by exploring the city, and the pubs, as well as the tourist attractions such as the Castle. We went to sea for the trials with a retired RN officer in command, which went quite smoothly in that most things worked well. *Engadine* was the first RFA to have stabilisers, and there was a key in which one could make them work manually. When we tried this out, the ship rolled rather alarmingly, and Captain Irwin said that he would keep the key around his neck. *Engadine* was probably one of the first RFA's not to be a tanker or a supply ship, so there was quite some interest when we first docked in Portsmouth, and an article in the Navy League's "Navy" queried as to why she was flying the Blue Ensign and not the White one.

Historical RFA keeps a list of everyone in the RFA who has passed away, and reading through it I note that I am the

last deck officer of that first commission to be still of this planet. Also, they have section on Heroes of the RFA which lists people who have done exceptional things at sea whilst in the RFA. Captain Irwin DSO DSC RD is not in that list because he was not in the RFA when he got his medals. He was at Saint Nazaire in command of an ML where he got one of his awards, and did other things in small boats in the Mediterranean. I feel he should be included, and if not, this should at least bring attention to some of his exploits. [Peter Harrison]

✍️ For your diary ✍️

RFAA AGM and Dinner pencilled in for Wednesday **20 October 2021** at Royal Maritime Club, Portsmouth



‘...when April Fool came early!’

Sometime during the last century ‘he’ was on a ship undergoing refit in Gibraltar which coincided with the Christmas and New Year period. Normally a small team of ship’s staff would be retained to stand-by for the duration of the refit and in addition a Night Duty Officer (NDO) was employed to act as the MoD ‘representative’ overnight while the ship’s team lived ashore and it was sometimes a retired RFA Old Man who took on the job to earn beer money. Well on this particular occasion the Madhouse had been unable to find anybody so he was volunteered to do the job. It was actually to the Choff’s advantage to have somebody around overnight who actually knew the ship and who could

undertake jobs like filling or emptying cargo tanks with water for pressure or leak testing or whatever. At the time there were 9 officers standing by during the day and the accepted procedure was that come 1700Z, they would all depart for their respective hotels, leaving just the Choff or 3/0 aboard to await the arrival of the NDO – at around 2000Z to handover any overnight instructions etc. None of the other officers carried out this duty – it was a ‘Deckies Job’- which ‘he’ felt was a rather arrogant attitude to take as they were all supposed to be ‘in the same boat’. One night he composed an official-looking Circular Letter by getting hold of a real one and blanking out the body of it, but not the letterhead, which he then copied and printed out on a photocopier. This ‘circular letter’ promulgated a Change-of-Policy for all officers standing by during a ship’s refit and it stated in clear terms that to “spread the load a bit more in future” with immediate effect ALL officers standing by were to take it in turns on a roster basis to await the arrival of the NDO instead of just either the Choff or 3/0 and that the Choff was to draw up such a roster. ‘He’ then squiggled a signature (of a real Madhouse employee) and the following morning showed it to the Choff. Who had a good laugh about it but said that this could cause chaos but nonetheless agreed to make up a roster and display it on the noticeboard in his office, drawing all officers’ attention to it. Well the totally predictable s**t-hit-the-fan and there were many quite vociferous grumbles about Leckies, Klankies and even the Sparks having to fulfil a Deckies task – but it worked an absolute treat and despite mutterings and vague threats about ‘getting the union involved’ they all reluctantly duly took their turn for the next 3 months of the lengthy refit. Towards the end of the refit the ship started ‘crewing up’ and both a Chief

Engineer and an Old Man were appointed. The Klankies went bleating to the Chief Engineer about the 'C/L' who said he would see the Old Man about the contents. Well of course the Old Man knew nothing about it, so 'he' had to pre-empt the Chief's visit by going to the Old Man and disclosing all. He read the 'C/L' and actually nearly wet himself laughing then said that if the rest of the officers were that daft then they deserved being taken in! He then proceeded to "give 'he' some advice" about the possible consequences of writing spurious C/Ls. The Old Man was the only person who had read the Circular properly and noticed the date on it – 25 December!! It took the thoroughly-duped guys some time to get over their chagrin and embarrassment! [Yarpie]



Life after the RFA...

Part 5 – Seoul... I had been invited to Head Office and they suggested Seoul, South Korea. Another frantic discussion with Dorothy and a couple months later I was on the plane to Seoul. We had looked at the map Seoul didn't seem to be too far north. Both of us had been in the Far East so we assumed that this would be similar. Not quite right! I had left Rio in October, early summer, with the temperature around 30C and arrived in Seoul in February, mid-winter, with the temperature -14C, a temperature difference of over forty degrees, that wasn't the only shock, fortunately, Dorothy had stayed behind with the kids for school, she wasn't impressed with the temperature.

Arriving in Seoul they put me in a comfortable hotel. A chauffeured driven car took me to and from the office which was only fifteen minutes away.

The office tended to be a little cold, with heat in the morning and nothing in the afternoon until early evening. I was very quickly introduced to Kimchi. If you like a lot of garlic and chillies, you would enjoy it. At that time there was a curfew from midnight to 4am. Local people were not allowed out after midnight, foreigners they tolerated but they would search the car before allowing you to proceed. This meant that the chauffeur had to be home before midnight and the ex-patriate had to drive the car after midnight. Office hours were generally from eight in the morning to about seven in the evening. A long day!



Some six weeks later I moved into my predecessor's flat, (he had been transferred to Australia) no problems, only food shopping to do in the supermarket nearby and his cooking. Unfortunately, there were no fast food type shops around, so it was either Kimchi or some basic cooking. Even my cooking was better than Kimchi. The supermarkets were not quite the same, as they were mainly for the local population, they did not quite cater for expatriates. There were many restaurants around but catering for the Korean cuisine, so I had a choice, Korean food, hotel food or my basic cooking. In addition, there were meals with clients which were generally with Korean food washed down with the Korean whisky and beer. As time was limited because of the curfew and the late start about 7pm the toasts were numerous and the glasses had to be emptied after each toast. Dinner would

end by 11pm for everyone to reach their homes before the start of the curfew. On one occasion, when I arrived home after dinner with some of his colleagues and feeling rather relaxed. In Korea, one used slippers in the home, however that particular evening I didn't put my slippers on and wandered into the bedroom in my socks. It didn't penetrate for a few seconds but I quickly realised my feet were under water. After a beer or two or three, I took my socks off and went to bed. In the morning I surveyed the scene and realised that the heavy rain had been driving at the bedroom window which leaked, allowing the water to pour in. Fortunately, the rain had stopped so I opened the window and started to mop up -- it took an hour or two, the carpet was still soaking. Next job was to look at the window, it didn't fit very well, there were large gaps around the frame. On the Monday I organised with some of my colleagues to obtain some sealant. Armed with this I proceeded to seal the window frames. No more water coming in!

A couple of days later I came home after dinner with clients and colleagues to find that the wall paper in the bedroom had literally fallen off one wall revealing a grey concrete surface with numerous small holes. Not at all pretty. So back to the shops to find some paint to cover the grey wall. After two coats it didn't look too bad. In June Dorothy joined me in Seoul. I didn't mention the window leaking or the wall paper falling off the wall but she did comment on the choice of the white painted wall in the bedroom. Later I did explain why or how. We went back to the UK at the end of July to be home for the boys' school holidays. For me this included a visit to Head Office to discuss the situation in Korea!!

To be continued [Colin Spencer]

I do recall...

The day after I joined at Portland ...we sailed and my education began, everyone was buzzing – we are off to Singapore! It was just a name to me then, but it turned into the 'bestest' place in the world, so much so, that I would not go back there now, as so much has changed.

We sailed out into the Atlantic stopping in the Canary Islands ...as we had broken down! Four days there and had some fun times ashore finding out the ridiculously low prices for alcohol, another lesson learned-watch out for strong drink, no matter how cheap it is! We were anchored out, so it was a boat ride to get ashore and back. There was one chap, a Quartermaster, I think, who would go ashore dressed in his suit, bowler hat and 'brolly, coming back from ashore I guess he had had a few and as he stepped onto the gangway, he misjudged and ended up in the water, bowler hat gone, never to be seen again!

On this lovely old ship, the catering arrangements were aft except the officer's saloon and pantry. This meant that for every meal, food would be collected from the galley and then carried all the way to the forward accommodation. No matter what the weather. One memorable time, there was a bit of wind and a swell, and carrying a deep press kit full of chips, halfway across the RAS deck, a big wave appeared. I hung on to the nearest post, got quite wet – the chips and the kit were a casualty. I went back to the galley and asked for more and promptly got told off for not hanging onto the chips (got to get the priorities right!) nothing about am I okay and go and get dry and change clothes.

Our first stop was Capetown, the Canal still being closed over a dispute between two countries. We were there about a week and took on some fresh stores etc, while there, one of the Castle

cruise ships berthed aft of us and there was some friendly banter and spud fights between the two ships.



“... Tidesurge's crew bar 1968”

Of course, we were in the right place, so did our first bit of the Beira Patrol, that was interesting, cruising up and down in the sun, people fishing, getting a suntan and generally having fun.

'Lofty' Nigel Thompson, one of the stewards, (he went on to do better things) was out fishing from the tank deck, when he got a really strong bite on his line. He fought and fought, at least an hour I think, when he finally got the creature to the surface, it was a huge shark, between twelve and sixteen feet (depending on who told the story). I do have a picture somewhere in my library and it is quite large. Unfortunately he was unable to land it and a boat could not be put down as the anchor was being lifted (weighed?) so we could not hang around, the shark eventually broke free, so it was always “*you should have seen the one that got away!*”

One sport we had was ‘water-fights’, for some reason, there were a lot of syringes around, just the tubes, not the pointy needles, and that is how it would start, one person would creep up on one of the stewards and squirt him with the syringe, then rush off to get a reload. Then more would appear and because it was too far to get water everytime, a cup of water would be carried, for a re-fill. Then a casual escalation would occur, where the cup of water would be

thrown at the next and before long, it was fire hoses being used!

There was a 'Sampson Post' above the PO's bar, with a platform on it, and should you step out of the accommodation, you were in danger of getting soaked from above. Ah the good old days, where you had fun, no one got hurt and everyone joined in to clean up afterwards. **to be continued**
[David the Galley]

Chocolate Easter Egg Nest Cake

Let's face it, after Boris's lockdown and 40 days of trying to give up anything (if you have even bothered) we can get a little jittery. Theobromine – the active ingredient in chocolate can boost mood, relax the body, improve brain function and remove all shame of gluttony!



Ingredients For the cake

- 250g 70% dark chocolate, chopped
- 125g softened butter
- 6 eggs: 2 whole, 4 separated
- 175g caster sugar : 75g for the yolk mixture, 100g for the whites
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract

For the topping

- 125g 70% dark chocolate chopped
- 250ml double cream
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1-2 packets of mini eggs (go on, use 2!)

The Method

1. Preheat the oven to gas mark 4/180°C/160°C Fan/350°F.
2. Line the bottom of a 23cm / 9in springform cake tin with baking

- parchment, or better still, Bake-O-Glide but do not grease the sides of the tin.
3. Melt the 250g / 9oz chocolate with the butter in either a double boiler or a microwave and then set aside to cool slightly.
 4. Whisk the 4 egg whites until firm, then gradually add the 100g / 2/3 cup of sugar and whisk until the whites are holding their shape but not stiff.
 5. In another bowl, the 2 whole eggs and 4 yolks with the 75g / 1/3 cup of sugar and the vanilla extract, and then gently fold in the chocolate mixture. Lighten the mixture with some egg whites - just dollop a large spoonful in and stir briskly - and then fold in the rest of the whisked whites gently, in about three goes.
 6. Pour into the prepared tin and bake for 35-40 minutes or until the cake is risen and cracked and the centre is no longer wobbly on the surface. Cool the cake in its tin on a wire rack; the middle will sink as it cools and the sides splinter. You want this to look like a cake with a crater in it, so don't panic when this happens.
 7. To finish the cake, carefully remove it from the tin and place it on a plate or cake-stand, pick up any bits that fall off here and there and scatter on top.
 8. Melt the chocolate for the topping and leave it to cool a little. Whip the cream until it is firming up and aerated but still soft, and then add the vanilla and fold in the melted chocolate. Fill the crater of the cake with the chocolaty cream, spreading out gently towards the edges of the cake with a rubber spatula, and then arrange the little sugar Easter eggs on top.

THE BUTANE BUDGIE!!

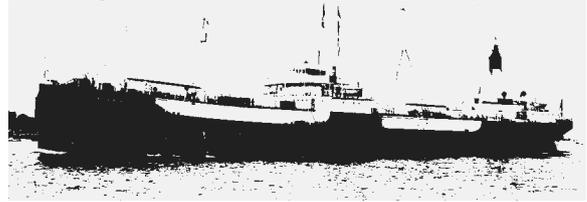
Do you remember that little Westland Wasp delivering our mail and films? The Westland Light Helicopter Heritage Group in its support of the Westland Wasp Historic Flight is striving to raise funds to keep Westland Wasp XT787 in the air.

Taking a modern online approach they have launched a Crowdfunding Campaign [Ian Prescott]

<https://www.crowdfunder.co.uk/keep-the-buzz-in-the-air-with-wasp-xt787/backers#start>



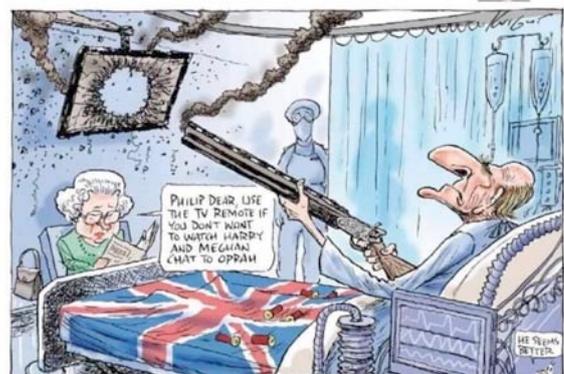
Really one of ours ...what ship is it?



Yes she is ...answers (or guesswork) to our Branch Sec who will draw up a list for publishing - that's your prize!

Disappointment comes in many forms

I remember that I failed my Masters orals because of the magnetic compass and the Examiner said "Go back to College and come back in three months". So I diligently went to College and became an expert on the magnetic compass. Full of confidence I went back and it was the same Examiner. "Did you go to college?", "yes, Sir", "So you are now expert on the compass?", raring to show off my skills I replied, "Yes". His response was, "Right then, no need to do the compass then so we will do some Rule-of-the-Road instead !" and after half an hour he passed me and I was off home slightly disappointed that I hadn't got the chance to show off my skills. [Philip Hanton]



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