



THE NEWSLETTER

of the London and Home Counties Branch – May 2021

In one of my recent meanderings I reminisced on passing my Masters Certificate and remembering one of the parts of the exam namely magnetism and what a waste of time it was. However, the one part that still brings a shiver to the spine was the oral examination, which I can remember was as long or as short as the examiner wanted it to be. The rumour was that if his wife (partner) had refused him the night before, one could expect a rough ride, obviously one did not know that, and so one had to be prepared for anything. The oral for Masters could cover anything about ships and the sea, and not just about what was in the course, so it could include something that was in the Second Mates syllabus. One question that had me flummoxed was what piece of equipment in an RFA enabled a ship to recover a life boat, I could only think of the davits, but this was an incorrect answer. The answer was the ATW gear for RASing, which I had to admit to him that I had never seen or heard of it being used for that. Another trick question was what signal was used for ships going astern, those in the know knew that in those days' ferries going astern into Dover or Folkestone put up two black balls. If you answered that, he would of course ask you if you put them up when going into Singapore? For those taking the exam in London, the dreaded place was Dock Street in Wapping, a grim building, which has now been replaced by an expensive block of flats. Sitting in the waiting

room, getting ready for the call was like waiting for your execution, in my case he forgot me and called for the man behind me. The secretary went straight up to him and told him of his error, after which he came down and profusely apologised. It was a stroke of luck, and my examination was done in a record-breaking short time. I suppose that Class One certificates still have an oral exam, please correct me if I am wrong, but having passed it, I do not wish to do it again. [Peter Harrison]



HRH Prince Philip
Duke of Edinburgh
1921 – 2021

It is with sadness that we record the death of – HRH Prince Phillip – Lord High Admiral of the United Kingdom – husband, father, grandfather, great grandfather and above all for us – a sailor.

A fair wind and following seas Sir



...NEWS FLASH...NEWSFLAS



“... The President of the Board of Trade has approved that current and future holders of Master (FG) ‘tickets should immediately obtain a ‘Suez Canal endorsement’. Merchant Navy training organisations, union representatives and NMB have already endorsed this ‘practical hands-on’ training course. Elderly veterans of the famous LRDG* will provide practical info on how to navigate and survive in a sand storm.”

*Long Range Desert Group



Q – what was the identify the mystery RFA in our edition 15?.

A – she was the freighting tanker WAR KRISHNA completed in 1919, RFA service 1921-1947. The only one of the ships in her class to have the funnel aft.

Colin our Classification Society wanderer provided us with an insight to food in South Korea. He made it sound so culinary that we decided to give you the opportunity to redeem its reputation... ..

Kimchi Jeon (Kimchi pancakes)

This takes around 10 minutes to prepare, 10 minutes to cook and a lot less to snarf down with a nice cold beer for a quick lunch!

To serve 4 (makes 4 pancakes) If you only want 1 or 2 the batter freezes well.



150g Plain flour
Good pinch of salt
1 large egg, beaten
250ml water
160g Kimchi, drained of excess liquid
1 medium carrot, peeled and grated.
A little oil for cooking.

- Sift flour into mixing bowl and stir in salt
- Add beaten egg and water and whisk together ‘till batter is smooth.
- Stir in Kimchi* and grated carrot
- Heat oil in 20cm frying pan over medium to high heat.
- Pour in a quarter of the batter mixture and cook for 4-5 mins. Turn over carefully and cook for same time the other side, pressing down a little to make sure the centre cooks through.

Once cooked, keep warm on non-stick baking tray in low oven till all the pancakes are cooked. Cut into triangles and serve warm with well chilled beer. Add some chilli dipping sauce if you want to up the ante.

*some milder versions are on the market, eg, Vadasz available in Waitrose.



Life after the RFA...

Part 6 – Seoul (continued)... I returned to Seoul at the end of August, Dorothy and my daughter Kyra staying on until our sons were back in school. There was an American School in Seoul which

Kyra would attend. The school had a bus for the children which was very convenient. It was a little difficult for her at the start but she gradually adjusted to the new system. We had to register my wife and daughter with the British Embassy which proved a good thing. The first thing we were told was that we had to have an emergency bag packed for each us in case North Korea. They also said that on Tuesday evenings they had a film show or social evening at the embassy. This was very good as we started to meet other Brits and their families. Dorothy very quickly made friends with the other wives and went shopping with them. There was also the HASH (a running club), and a British football team. I didn't play football, but rugby, however, I did play in the occasional football match in Seoul as goal keeper.

We very quickly established some friends and in no time, they were being invited to someone's home for dinner. The evenings usually ended after curfew with me driving home as my driver had to be in his home before curfew. After midnight there was virtually no traffic but there were checkpoints with armed guards. They would have to stop at the checkpoint, one guard would shine his torch into the car to make sure there were no Koreans present, if there had been the Korean would have been arrested and put in jail. They would check the boot and then allow us to proceed. It was rather tense at first but gradually one adjusted to it. However, on one occasion as I opened the window in addition to shining his torch into the car, the guard rested his rifle on the door while they did the inspection. [Ed. And we had the temerity to complain about our 'health' lockdown]

The wives very quickly got themselves organised. Korea was becoming an important manufacturer of clothing. They would organise themselves to visit

the markets, one husband would be given the job of organising the car and driver. At that time the markets would contain a lot of clothes that had been manufactured for export but had been rejected by the buyers because of defects. It could be a minor defect such as a missing button or a major defect such as bad stitching or bad cutting. [Ed. What would you call a missing sleeve?] Prices were be a fraction of the cost compared to what it would be in Europe. The wives had a fine time. On one occasion my MD and his wife were visiting and Dorothy took her to the market. Well, Dorothy hadn't noticed the meat that was hanging from the hooks in some of the stalls. As they passed one stall the MD's wife wanted to go back to the hotel immediately. It was in July, hot and humid. In Korea they like to eat dog in the summer months. Our visitor didn't want to do any more sight-seeing, she liked dogs but as a pet.

To be continued [Colin Spencer]



“... as The Suez Canal Company files a multi-million pound compensation claim sources have leaked a picture of the individual possibly responsible ...” A statement by ‘Del boy’ confirmed that ‘Rodney’ would be his legal representative.

I do recall...

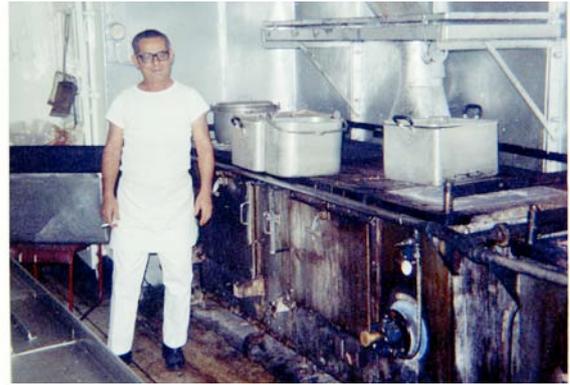
When on Beira, one of the main stops was always Mombasa. In those days, it was a lovely run ashore, up to the mission for a swim, and a walk along Kilindini road to the Tusks and beyond. The gentle bartering with the owners of the 'K Boats' to get a lift back to the ship.



1968 RFA Tidesurge at work

The one odd thing was that while on Beira, because it was a sanctions thing, against Ian Smith's regime after they declared UDI, we were supposed to be stopping ships going into the port and trading with the regime. The ships that were running the 'blockade' were in a lot of cases, like the sleek looking Southampton Castle faster than the ones doing the challenging!

On our way again, to the Far-East, and we stopped at Gan, using the 36 foot work boat for shore runs, we tied up alongside RFA Wave Victor and did some cargo swapping and topping up, we did get a chance to get ashore, but there wasn't much to see or do, except annoy the large bats hanging in the trees. Over night on our last day, the work boat mysteriously disappeared from her moorings at the bottom of the gangway, although a search was made, it was never seen again!!



RFA Tidesurge - Emmanuel DeGiorgio in that oil-fired galley (1968).

At last, we are going through the islands and up the river to Sembawang Naval Base, what an eye opener that place was, a garden dockyard, big, busy and clean.

There was a huge floating crane, two floating drydocks, supposedly left over from the Japanese occupation, plus three other drydocks, loads of cranes and warehouses and shipwright shops, many naval vehicles running around and loads of warships and submarines and a couple more RFA's. One of which was the RFA Reliant [Ed. The Yacht], anchored out.

This was a dockyard that had a free swimming pool, which was up a mound in the middle of the yard, with refreshments available, there was a cinema just outside the dockyard, but still inside the Naval Base and then there was the 'Village' Sembawang. WOW!

I loved it, all the shops... and the bars... and the food stalls... and the bars... and the taxi drivers... and the bars, I think I mentioned them. [David the Galley]

...more memories

I have fond memories of Eddyfirth. As a 2/O I was drafted in to cover whilst the incumbent went on leave. There was no handover and all I was told was "you'll only be here two weeks and won't have to do anything just watchkeep on the trip from Scotland to Fawley"...

[*Ed. Sounds like that familiar Madhouse reassurance*] Weather delays etc extended my stay and I was expected to pay the crew and do the tax returns and victualling etc – none of which I had a clue about. With a bit of help from the Old Man (who had similarly been drafted in a Leave cover) we managed to put something together. I am sure that we got the paperwork incredibly wrong and when the 2/O I was relieving returned he didn't seem too bothered though I often wondered if they ever managed to sort out the mess we left. [Philip Hanton]

Personalities '80ft Rees'

In 1938 the old tanker *War Bahadur* encountered heavy weather in the North Atlantic – not unusual you think! – well the whole of her bridge deckhouse, lifeboats and amidships accommodation was wrecked – unfortunate you think! She was navigated from her emergency steering position and under escort safely reached Devonport. Her Master – Captain David A Rees RFA – and her First Mate on arrival 'appeared' on the BBC radio – series "In town tonight". [*Ed.* Home Service predecessor to Radio 4 – no TV or social media in those days.] After his performance the Master was forever known in the RFA as '80ft Rees' he having had the temerity to describe the waves as of that height.

On Cyprus Patrol

The RFA was operational during the EOKA conflict in Cyprus. The three ships that undertook the monthly refuelling duty spells were the *Black*, *Blue* and *Brown Rangers*. Anchored far out off Famagusta for security they were known to the army garrison as the 'Lone Rangers' – after a popular TV series at the time.

Based in Malta it was a bonus to the Maltese crews. They spent time at home and to the officers to have families

resident in Malta. The Captains and Chief Engineers joined their wives on board. Plenty of stand-by time between calls for RASs. Going ashore was restricted by curfews and other emergency regulations. Still it was not too bad. Besides the dry cargo they carried many films for distribution to the Navy. Nearly every night there was a film to watch. It was during one of those shows that the Chief Engineer told of the news of the Manchester United plane crash. We played a lot of scrabble and the bar was always open on a self-service signing chit system.

Fishing while at anchor was another pastime. With shoals of squid attracted by the deck lights produced fine catches. The ship's pump man went for the big game. He had a bite by a six foot shark on his makeshift line with one end with a large hook and the other tied to a metal bucket running through the porthole in his cabin. His catch was displayed on deck for all to see. The following day he threw it back. The stench was unbearable. I stopped swimming off the side after that. I did not believe that sharks were coming up from the Red Sea via Suez into the Med.

Going to church on Sundays was by boat to take us ashore to a waiting armed army escort. Formed a relationship with mostly the last of the national servicemen. The army was running the port of Famagusta, as well as the security gates. They were always grateful for a bottle or two of the local wine. Football matches were arranged. Suffered losses and stiff muscles on the sea legs. Against the smaller crews of the *Ton* class minesweepers the scores were more favourable.

One night we missed the last boat back to the ship. One of us had the courage to knock on the door of one of the nissen huts and ask if they could take us to the ship. They were awoken in the belief that it was an official order.

When they realised it was not they quickly returned to their bunks with some effing language! We spent the night with Norwegian hospitality on a merchantman of the Normed Lines.

Not long after another Normed ship went aground off the Syrian port of Latakia. *Blue Ranger* had a small and useful task in the salvage operation. Forgot about it until years later I received a cheque of some £57 salvage money. A pleasant surprise. *RFA Blue Ranger* was to have that indignity as she ran aground on Haisboro Sands on the 28 November 1964. Refloated without serious damage or injuries.

The only recorded fatality on that ship was that of one of the seamen who was discharged dead as a result of serious injuries during a RAS. Sadly, to this day, there are no records of his burial and he has no marked grave.

When the Navy needed a 'foreign' ship for boarding practice they picked on *Blue Ranger*. I still have a photo of her flying the Egyptian colours. *Blue Ranger* was also given the role by Admiral Myers C-in-C Eastern Mediterranean to have Christmas Midnight Mass. The ship's dry cargo fore-castle being suitably transformed for the memorable service. Many visitors that night nearly as much as when we hosted a massed band of a Scottish regiment. That band was transferred across by boatswain's chair.

Sometimes we were reminded that there was a conflict on that island. While at anchor at 0200, an emergency knock on my cabin and instructions to get down below asap. It was not a dream! A message from the RN said that frogmen activity was spotted near the ship. Telegraph orders intermittent of full astern and full astern added to the confusion. To this day I do not know if it was for real or an exercise.

Another close shave. It happened towards the end when many detainees were released. Revenge was surely to

follow and terrorist shootings increased. Decided to go ashore with Joe Debattista, another Maltese Junior Engineer. Strolling in the main street of the Greek area of Famagusta we were suddenly surrounded by a group of hostile young men. We were jostled and pushed about. Realising what was about to happen, Joe and I decided to speak in Maltese. This had the desired effect and with a sorry we thought you were English they went away. Still shaking we had a much needed drink in the nearest bar. I think of that when I put on my Cyprus General Service medal and thank God for still being here.

Working closely with the Mediterranean Fleet had the 'compensation' of being part of the naval NATO exercises Medex -- escorted convoys and 'dive bombed' by US aircraft was a display I will not forget. It is the last place one wants to be in real wartime conditions. At the end there were courtesy visits to -- Messina, Barcelona, Pireaus and Izmir. Some good times with a good rate of money exchange. The consulates would put on lavish parties exclusive to officers, mingled with diplomatic staff.

I recall the time in my early years woken up in the middle of the night to the sound of ships sirens as part of the New Year celebrations. In 1959 I had the opportunity as 'duty engineer', tied up in Malta, to sound the two sirens steam and air power. I was powered by that 'Scottish liquid'. [John Caruana]



**BZ to ARGUS!!
RFA SHIP OF
THE YEAR 2020**

rfaa.london@gmail.com

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

16th edition : May 2021

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

