

ROYAL NAVY
1954-1956

by

Michael G F Crowe.

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Introduction.

I was called up to do my National Service at the age of 18, in October 1954 at the height of the Cold War and between the conflicts in Korea and Suez. The possibility of a Third World War seemed imminent and Margaret Alaski had just published her play "Off shore island" where the action centred on a small community that had survived atomic bombs dropped on the UK.

Conscription at that time meant that every able-bodied youth was required to serve two years in the armed forces unless he could claim exemption. Many of the boys at the Quaker school that I attended claimed to be conscientious objectors and spent the time in the Friends Ambulance Service or some similar occupation. However, as the son of a retired RAF Officer who had seen action in both World Wars and was a lecturer in Civil Defence advising the local population on what to do if nuclear bombs were dropped on England, I felt that if there was to be another war I would wish to take an active part.

I could have deferred my National Service until after I had qualified as a doctor, but during an interview for a place at Magdalene College, Cambridge, the Senior Tutor advised me to do my National Service first and then he would guarantee me one of the three places that they allocated for would be medical students each year. It seemed an opportunity too good to turn down.

Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve

As the school did not have a Cadet Corps, I signed on as a Junior Seaman with the local Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve in Hull – HMS Galatea. My first experience of life at sea was aboard a wooden hulled minesweeper based in Portland, Dorset. I well remember washing down the deck with mops and scrubbers with bare feet early on a very cold morning. The RNVR captain for the voyage down to Torquay was very out of practice at conning the ship. He was doing his two weeks annual training. He tried several times to manoeuvre the small minesweeper into a berth on the outer pier at Torquay eventually securing alongside but tearing off a large wooden fender in the process.

Before being accepted for National Service in the Navy, it was necessary to pass a physical examination that took place in Leeds with particular emphasis on colour blindness. Most of the navigation buoys at that time flashed red green or white so a person who was red /green colour blind was not acceptable.

Victoria Barracks, Portsmouth.

In September 1954 I was instructed to present myself at Victoria Barracks, Portsmouth for preliminary training. The new intake was divided up into groups of 20 with a regular RN Petty Officer in charge.

On the first day we were issued with our new Ordinary Seaman's uniforms: - best quality serge bellbottom trousers and tops; blue working garments; sports gear; underwear; boots; socks; gym shoes; sewing and cleaning kits etc and a kit bag to put it all in. When prepared for inspection, most of these items had to be rolled into bundles nine inches across and held in place with rubber bands at either end and with the sailor's name in white paint stencilled carefully across the middle. There were two Naval ratings caps, [dark blue/black for winter and white topped for summer.] We had to tie on a cap band, with HMS Victory in gold thread, so that the middle letter was dead centre above the eyes and the bow, neatly splayed and trimmed, above the left ear.

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The main shock of those first few days was the unfamiliar social mix of the new recruits. Having been a boarder at a minor Public School – it was the first time that I had had to compete on equal terms with young men from such a wide variety of backgrounds. It seems absurd now, but it was the first time that I had met people using the “I” word and its derivatives in normal conversation. It was used several times in a sentence as a noun, verb or adjective.

The objective of the Petty Officer in charge of us was to regiment his squad into the best disciplined; smart; unquestioning; foot perfect body of men in the barracks. There was fierce competition between the different squads, which promoted strong group loyalty, and support. Unfortunately he had not bargained on having a tall uncoordinated young man who normally walked with left arm and left leg swinging forward together rather than the normal left leg and right arm. We spent hours trying to get him to march in step with the rest of us eventually succeeding, up to a point.

Victoria Barracks was an old army base and had a huge parade ground on which we spent hours every day practicing the various basic marching and rifle handling drills. There is a curious corporate feeling of satisfaction to be had from completing a complex routine with every one exactly together.

National Service in the Navy mirrored the opportunities for sailors on the Lower Deck to be selected to do an Upper Yardman’s Course, which resulted in men being promoted to being an officer – in our case, a National Service Midshipman RNVR. A number of us applied to the selection Board and we were put through a series of initiative tests including written exams and an interview with a psychologist. We took it in turns to be in charge of a small group of six candidates and were given practical problem solving tasks in the gym. Mine, I remember, required an action plan to get the team across a “crocodile infested swamp” together with a large box containing a “bomb” using a random selection of ropes and planks, as quickly as possible and with nobody touching the “swamp.”

My time with the very attractive psychologist was interesting. Spurred on by the need to show courage and initiative, towards the end of the interview, I asked her if she was free to join me for a drink that evening. Needless to say she declined.

The squads took it in turns to be on guard duty every third night. This entailed marching around our side of the parade ground and being dropped off at a series of sentry posts. We were issued with old Lee Enfield rifles and told to look out for anyone crossing from the other side, which happened to be the WRENs barracks. I suspect that we were a convenient deterrent, but it got us used to the discipline of sentry duty. I used to hum the Gilbert and Sullivan guardsman’s song from *Iolanthe* to help pass the time.

Inoculations and medical advice.

Before we were transferred to the two light aircraft carriers of the Training Squadron at Portland, Dorset, we had to have injections to prepare us for going abroad. I well recall the line of sailors queuing for the Typhoid jab. The Sick Bay attendant used the same syringe and needle for all of us as it was before the days of disposable equipment. Several of the men fainted before their turn came.

We also had a “no holds barred” lecture on health and sexual encounters. The doctor showed us a film of the various effects of gonorrhoea and syphilis and acting on the assumption that we would follow the naval tradition of trying to sleep with a girl in every port, he offered the following advice. Before attempting sexual intercourse, we should make a small hole in a sheet of newspaper, pull it down onto the erect penis and secure it in place by rolling on a standard “free issue” condom. This would protect the sailor from the above as well pubic lice, venereal warts etc.

Training squadron.

After a few weeks, we were transferred to the Training Squadron based at Portland near Weymouth, Dorset. Our group of sixteen National Service Upper Yardmen [NSUYs] went to HMS Theseus and the others to HMS Ocean. These aircraft carriers had become obsolete, as had the previous training carriers - HMS Indefatigable and HMS Implacable. HMS Ark Royal had taken over as the most powerful capital ship in the fleet. We were required to wear white flashes on our shoulders [see photo] to show that we were not ordinary seamen. This resulted in us being set apart from both officers and men. We seemed to do more than our fair share of cleaning out the “heads” or toilets. We had to try very hard to gain some degree of respect.

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My Midshipman's Journal S519 starts on 11.10.54 and all young officers in training were required to make regular entries. It ends on 30.10.55. The contemporaneous notes and pictures provide the basis for this account.

October 14th 1954.

"We arrived at Weymouth station from Victoria Barracks, Portsmouth at 1500 and immediately set to loading up the lorries with kit. We were driven down to Camber pier, Portland in ageing Bedford buses, the back springs of which creaked at every jolt. The floating dock was empty and only HMS Porchester Castle was present, alongside the inner pier. The Venezuelan destroyer "Nueva Espata" was alongside the outer pier the grey of the vessel being a much greener grey than that used by the Royal Navy." We were ferried out to the training carriers on board an MFV and noted that the carriers were to all outward appearances identical even to the final detail of having a Sea Fury aircraft secured aft of the after liftwell. The flight decks could not be used for flying operations as all the directional instruments had been removed and the flight crews dispersed.

HMS Maidstone, the submarine depot ship had one small submarine alongside on her starboard quarter. We found the NSUY's mess very cramped and had to stow our kit immediately in order to be able to move. That night we had to sling our hammocks from bars above the mess tables and benches – they were very comfortable – the design had not changed since the Nelson era.

The following day, we finished our joining routine and had lectures by our Divisional officers. We were told that we had to become the most efficient men on board and work exceedingly hard if we really wished to become officers.

In the evening, HMS Jamaica came into Portland Harbour and secured to a buoy half way between HMS Ocean and HMS Maidstone. Vice Admiral Cuthbert, Flag Officer of Flotilla Home was on board and during the next few days a great many Morse code messages were flashed between her and the other ships in the harbour. Most of the messages were short administrative instructions and while not in code, they included a number of abbreviations as featured in the Yeoman's Signal Manual. The speed of the signalmen sending the words letter by letter was very fast indeed even so it was a very slow process and messages had to be brief and to the point.

An anecdote of the period illustrates this: - An admiral was returning to harbour and needed his shirts laundering urgently. The yeoman signalled, "REQUEST ADMIRAL'S WOMAN STOP DOCKSIDE. 1100". The admiral was shown the message that had been sent and felt it might be open to misinterpretation and asked for a correction to be sent to emphasise the washing and ironing that was required. The following signal was sent "AMEND LAST MESSAGE STOP BETWEEN ADMIRAL AND WOMAN INSERT WASHER."

Modern telephone links would not supersede the Morse code and semaphore signalling for several decades. The traditional signal flags that had been used since before the battle of Trafalgar were in constant use with just a few flags conveying a much longer message. A young naval officer gave his fiancée a very pretty brooch of four signalling flags on a silver rope. She was thrilled but noticed that other officers would examine the brooch and go off smiling. Eventually she got a friend to tell her what it meant -"PERMISSION TO LIE ALONGSIDE" was the reply.

HMS Jamaica was a "Fiji" Class Cruiser, which was completed in 1942. Her sister ship, HMS Gambia, had been in the news during the previous week in connection with the state visit of the Emperor of Ethiopia, Haile Selassie. He had been aboard for the passage between Malta and Portsmouth and had observed Fleet manoeuvres in the Mediterranean with the Destroyer flotilla; four Pakistani destroyers and the aircraft carrier HMS Centaur en route. These manoeuvres would have included high speed, co-ordinated jig jag changes of course; anti aircraft and smoke scene exercises; anti submarine and asdic procedures and gunnery target practice.

Chris Chataway's terrific victory over Emile Kuts in the 5000 metres in a new world record time of 13 mins. 51.6 seconds was the most notable athletics news of the week.

19th Oct. We spent most of the day preparing for sea. My work ship job was with the forecastle party and from the cable deck we were able to see most of the preparations for slipping the bridles and in the final stages actually helped. At 1715 the final rope was slipped and run in and we were away. I had expected an immediate increase in vibrations in the ship and a surge forward, so the tranquil progress that followed was most surprising. We glided very quietly out of Portland harbour and were at sea. Apart from a very slight roll, I scarcely noticed the difference.

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20th Oct. We sailed in towards Falmouth with HMS Ocean astern, and dropped anchor at 0915. Immediately preceding this, the ship's crew had lined the guard rails and saluted the flagship of the Home Fleet, HMS Tyne with Admiral Sir Michael Denny aboard, with a seventeen gun salute. The guns were fired alternately starting on the starboard side. There was a pause of between five and ten seconds between each discharge. HMS Tyne then answered with a thirteen gun salute in honour of our Rear Admiral Calill. I commented " it just shows how much the Navy is having to economise when the C in C Home Fleet has a Depot Ship for his Flagship."

21st Oct. The assembled ships prepared for a major convoy exercise in the English Channel at the start of our passage down to Gibraltar. As HMS Theseus was weighing anchor and the cable was coming in fast and being washed and scrubbed, the cable officer suddenly shouted, "Stop. Foul anchor." The flukes of the anchor had picked up a cable from the seabed and it had to be lifted off using a cable passed over the bows, before the anchor could be secured. "We were told that it might be years before we came across another fouled anchor, so take note."

Convoy

The convoy, consisting of HMS Jamaica; HMS Tyne; HMS Theseus; HMS Ocean an oil tanker and an ocean going tug, had an antisubmarine screen of eight destroyers Apart from the convoy exercise, other tasks were programmed. Firstly we were taken in tow by the tug "Reward" and then did two transfers of sacks of potatoes using the jackstay method with the destroyers HMS Battleaxe and HMS Scorpion. This involved throwing a heaving line across to a ship steering a parallel course about 30 yards away. Then a wire rope would be hauled across by hand and attached to a hook 8ft above the deck. The wire would be kept taught by a team of sailors on the first ship using a tug of war team technique. A pulley would be clamped onto the wire and a sack of potatoes clipped on which would be rapidly pulled across to the other ship. The procedure was frequently used to transfer people from ship to ship and it could be a risky business especially in rough weather. The Jackstay transfer was done at cruising speed and required great care as the ships steered closer to take advantage of the bow and stern pressure waves of each ship.

23rd Oct. During the night, the submarine HMS Anchorite" made another attack on the convoy and in the afternoon we "oiled" HMS Agincourt while HMS Ocean oiled HMS Aisne – both Battle class destroyers. Two hundred tons of fuel were passed over.

25th Oct. The main exercise of the day was an atomic defence exercise. The whole of the superstructure, flight deck and weather decks were "pre-wetted" with jets of water and our gas masks were tested. While we were waiting for the exercise to finish, we assembled in No 12 Lecture Room and were each given a subject for a one minute lecture. Mine was "Where there's muck, there's money." I could only think of the farming aspect but I think my earthy light-hearted treatment of the topic went down well.

Gibraltar

26th Oct. "From early morning the coasts of Spain and Africa were clearly visible and the legendary dolphins arrived to leap and play ahead of our bows. We glided very slowly into Gibraltar harbour passing cocooned frigates on the outer pier and finally went astern into a berth used by the battleship HMS Vanguard in 1951.

News that day included speculation about the possible retirement of Sir Winston Churchill; a report that concluded that the problem that caused the crash of the jet airliner "Comet" had been due to metal fatigue fractures and the appointment of Earl Louis Mountbatten of Burma as Admiral of the Fleet.

Task Force 16 of the 6th US Fleet

28th Oct 1400 The whole of Task Force 16 of the 6th US Fleet came into the harbour. The Task Force consisted of a huge aircraft carrier USS Valley Forge; a Balao class submarine USS Picuda; 3 Gearing Class destroyers and 3 Summer Class destroyers. The next day we changed into our number two uniforms and marched along the jetty for a tour of inspection of the Valley Forge. We reformed squad inside the vast hanger and watched a tractor circling round and round polishing the deck until it shone. We were born swiftly to the flight deck on a hydraulically operated lift and lectured to by a very quietly spoken American Aviation Lieutenant. He told us about the history of the ship - she had been

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commissioned in 1946 and was very active in the Korean War. He described the air strike potential; the ship's main armament and in particular the 4 five inch guns protecting the "island" set on the starboard side of the flight deck with the bridge, the flight control centre and all the radar and wireless equipment. The Task Force had a global role at a time when the Soviet Union was the main threat. He did not like the angled deck that had just come into fashion in the Royal Navy "as you cannot get up and down wind on a calm day and secondly, the lines painted on the deck makes it look as if you are flying into a tunnel. On our left some marines were being drilled. The officer would utter a series of musical "HOs" of indefinite duration and the marines would start a series of rifle shifting, sidestepping movements ending in the position that they had started in. "As they did not swing their arms, the marching looked slovenly". The deck consisted of teak planking aft for wear and Douglas fir for the rest. They were slowly changing to an all-metal deck surface.

There were a large number of aircraft and helicopters aboard. The helmsman was on the bridge, not below in a wheelhouse and the wheel looked like a car's steering wheel rather than the traditional wheel with handles that *was* the norm in the RN, We were told that destroyers capable of 45 knots were being built.

In the afternoon we were taken in the officers motor boat to a pier north of the Picuda and played a most energetic game of hockey against the Gun Room [junior officers mess.] "The dust and heat were unprecedented and at half time we cleared our respiratory surfaces as far as the epiglottis with iced Coca Cola. We won after a very hard fight and immediately hired conveyances and arrived at a beach beyond the aerodrome after five minutes of reckless driving." Despite the fact that it was on the Mediterranean side of the rock, "the water was as cold as the north east coast of England but it was very refreshing."

1st Nov. The 16th Task Force sailed for Norfolk, USA. HMS Jamaica; HMS Crossbow and HMS Sanguine [a peacock blue "S" Class submarine indicating that it was part of the Med Fleet] also left to give them a send off and carry out joint exercises.

3rd Nov. In the evening we had a second practice round of rigging sheer legs. Sheer legs was a procedure where two telegraph poles were bound together at one end then pulled apart at the other end and hauled up into a vertical position. Guy ropes were secured to keep the triangular shape upright. A pulley had been secured on to the apex and a long rope passed through to enable loads to be lifted and swung across an obstacle, in our case the open after lift well on the flight deck. The point of the challenge was to see how fast a team could erect the sheer legs, transfer a load and then dismantle the sheer legs again. There were ten NSUYs in the forward team and six in the aft. Unfortunately, the sheer legs were dropped onto the guardrails around the lift well and these collapsed under the strain.

HMS Crossbow

4th Nov. At 0655 we boarded HMS Crossbow for the day. She was a Weapons Class destroyer her main armament being two pairs of forward facing 4inch guns. In addition she had two sets of five torpedo tubes; two twin Boffor guns and two Squids. Boffor guns were highly manoeuvrable; hand operated rapid fire anti aircraft guns. The SQUID was a sophisticated weapon designed to fire a pattern of six depth charges out ahead of the ship as it closed with a submerged submarine. The submarine's position course and speed were calculated and updated with the ASDIC equipment. The charges would all go off together at the estimated depth of the submarine and all around it with the intention of crushing the hull.

During the morning, RAF Vampires made mock attacks on both HMS Jamaica and HMS Crossbow. Action stations were piped at 1100 and all the guns were manned. From 1200 to 1400 the submarine HMS Sanguine made mock attacks and we picked her up on the very advanced Asdic equipment. ASDIC is short for Anti Submarine Detection Investigation System. It worked by sending out a pulse of sound at frequent intervals. If a submarine was within range, the signal pulse would be reflected back and recorded on a television monitor. The submarine's position relative to the ship would show up as a white spot. The spot slowly faded but the next contact spot would show up in a few seconds. From the display it was possible to calculate the submarine's course and speed and any avoiding action it was taking. Unfortunately, the ASDIC equipment often failed, as they were still experimental and relied on hand soldered circuit boards and old-fashioned valves. The microchip had yet to be developed.

Practice unarmed torpedoes were fired and later recovered using the ship's whaler. We were shown all over the ship including the two sets of boiler and engine rooms.

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On our return to Gibraltar, we were able to see the eastern face of the rock more clearly. There is an enormous area of rock coloured corrugated iron sheeting stretching from the top to within a hundred feet of the base. The water collected is led into a maze of tunnels drilled into the rock. The main water works buildings are on the western face. My Journal entry ended with "It really was a most enjoyable day, a taste of things to come perhaps."

Sat 6th Nov. I was a member of Petty Officer Taylor's whaler racing crew. We set off well supplied and in high spirits with a fluctuating breeze on our starboard bow. We were the first over the starting line but the wind failed after the first flag and from then on we glided jerkily round the course one and a quarter times. The wind then dropped altogether and we had to pull back to the ship. At least it warmed us up." Whalers were traditional clinker built rowing boats 27ft long and they had been designed for catching whales with hand thrown harpoons. The whaler could be rowed or sailed with a mainsail and jib.

Remembrance Sunday

7th November. At an open-air service on the flight deck, we remembered those who had lost their lives in the war. We were reminded of the debt we owed them "Pray God they have not died in vain,"

The two-minute silence passed in a wonderful deep hush, which was shattered, after a beautifully played bugle call, by the explosions from the saluting guns. "It seems ridiculous that we should, in fact, still be preparing for war."

Tues 9th Nov. HMS Battleaxe and HMS Charity arrived from Home with a draft of NSUYs and ratings. Twelve NSUYs were stuffed into our Mess with the usual initial inconvenience. Typically, a Mess was situated in a windowless compartment about 30ft x 20ft x 10ft high. Sealable doors with high sills led off to adjoining spaces. There were banks of lockers for all our kit all round the walls. Long tables and benches to seat about 30 men were secured to the deck. Bars to sling our hammocks to were overhead at a height of about 8ft. The headroom under the hammocks at night was only about 5ft. There was no privacy and it would have been impossible to share the Mess with women. As it was, the Navy were careful to reject anyone with disruptive or homosexual tendencies. Homosexuality was still forbidden by law.

Despite the cramped conditions, everyone got along very well - played card games; read; wrote letters or just chatted. Sailors were allowed to smoke but there was no access to alcohol except for the daily issue of a "tot" of watered down rum to those over 21. This was allocated on a named basis and had to be swallowed on the spot. When I was first in the Navy, there were polished spittoons in every Mess to cater for the older sailors who liked to chew tobacco. They were called spittoons because the residue of the plug of tobacco would be spat out, with great accuracy, into the spittoon from up to 10ft away. At meal times, the Mess allocation of food was collected from the ships galley in large flat trays. The standard of the diet and the quantity of food was good, far better than the school food that I had been used to.

HMS Battleaxe has been very swiftly repaired after her collision. The story, apparently, was that HMS Scorpion had done her run in on the submarine and had cleared off. The submarine, however, had steered so that she was immediately below her. HMS Battleaxe now did a run in using Asdics only. Thus she steered straight for HMS Scorpion. The exercise was a simulated wartime attack with everyone battened down below decks to guard against nuclear fall out. The bridge of a destroyer at that time was open to the elements, so there were no lookouts on duty.

HMS Scorpion had her radar going, saw that a collision was imminent and steered so that HMS Battleaxe only scraped along her side. To those in HMS Battleaxe, it felt as if they were running over the top of the submarine. It was more by luck than good judgement that a major accident was avoided. "Thus a horrible time was had by all."

HMS Apollo

Fri Nov 12th. HMS Apollo entered the harbour during cleaning stations and secured to the dock just south of HMS Jamaica. She was completed in 1944 and is now the auxiliary flagship of the C. in C. Home Fleet. She has an average speed of 35 knots and is capable of 42 knots She has two main engines, her extra power coming from extra boilers witness the third funnel. She can carry about 100 mines, which are released through the sliding doors right aft.

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We had a dress rehearsal at the “sheer legs” exercise this afternoon at 1620. The run went splendidly until a heaving line became tangled with the block of the jackstay. Our run lasted 38 minutes. After this, I was duty NSUY on watch for the first time. Officers streamed off and in board all the time and the Admiral made several trips ashore. There seem to be a very large number of things that the O.O.W. [Officer of the watch.] has to think about. The deck log records just the bare essentials eg. “0900 HMS Jamaica left.” No mention of why or where she was going.

Sat 13th Nov. “At 1027 our momentous sheer legs run commenced. With a minimum of talk, we rigged the forward set and had them down aft in 10 mins. Our total time was 29 mins with one, one-minute penalty making a total of 30 mins. Poor old Roper had a nasty accident when picking up a sheer leg. He overbalanced and the leg crushed his neck onto a ringbolt. A very nasty lump immediately developed. It took four Petty Officers to hold him down. His first thought on returning to consciousness was that he had let us down. He really is a mighty plucky old brick.”

When we went ashore after lunch, we passed HMS Saintes, a Battle Class destroyer of the 3rd Mediterranean Squadron having a refit in No. 3 Dock. It looked as if she was being fitted with Squids.

We did a tour of as much of the external part of the rock as possible. On Queen’s Road there were ringbolts sunk into the rock at the roadside. These we were told were used when hauling the guns up to the top of the rock during the war. The view from the top was awe-inspiring. We could see right down into Africa and up into the Spanish mountains. This was the first time that we had seen the harbours across the bay and the extent to which the airstrip, built up from rock from “the rock”, extended out into the sea.

Sun 14th Nov. The NSUY hockey team had a match against HMS Reclaim. We had a very tough struggle. They won 4-0.

NSUY debate

Mon 15th Nov. The Admiral, the Captain and a large following of brother officers honoured the NSUY “Parliament” with their presence tonight. The debate was on “This house believes that the love of justice is due to the fear of injustice.” The table speakers were all very good speakers and the motion purely incidental, an excuse for an outpouring of intellectual waffle. It was certainly the best debate that I had attended and as usual, I was too reticent to take part, not having an adequate speech in my mind. Everyone was agreeably surprised by the excellence of the speeches.

Debates were part of the NSUY Course training experience and were designed to develop a degree of competence, teamwork and self-reliance when speaking to groups of people. In this case it was a chance to perform in front of our Course examiners. Debates were also partly recreational because, in such cramped living conditions 24/7, there was little scope for regular sporting activities when at sea.

Tues 16th Nov. We experienced a “Leviathan storm”. The wind came across the bay in great gusts swirling the water into a spiral. These gusts made the precise timing in squad drill a little difficult to perform with the result that we came to know the flight deck circuit quite well. [The main punishment for poor performance was to run a number of times around the flight deck.]

The P.O. Instructors did their sheer legs run. Due to their experience and good teamwork, they completed the *run* in 18 mins with 6 mins penalties. HMS Ocean managed to get the time down to 16 mins.

Thurs 18th Nov. Four American destroyers arrived today from Beirut where they had been giving medical aid to victims of a torch light procession. Several torches were dropped and more than 200 people badly burnt.

Cathedral Service

Sun 21st Nov. We attended morning service at the cathedral at 1000. The church was packed and the service can be said to have gone with a swing. Afterwards, Clayton, another callow youth of 18 straight from boarding school, was as keen as I was to sample some Spanish cuisine and we walked through the public gardens and finally had a meal at Monty’s. While we were having our “eggs a la flamenco” an English couple came in and studied the menu. After a time the woman said with great emphasis “chips and baked beans please.” Neither of us could resist a chuckle at this lack of imagination.

Tangier

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Tues 23rd Nov. We sailed for Tangier, only two and a half hours away. The weather was again gracious and the view magnificent. At 0845 we fired a National Salute of 21 guns in the Bay of Tangiers all hands lining the guardrails forward. This was returned, gun for gun. Later in the day the British Consul General of Tangier, Mr Monks, came aboard and was saluted with 15 guns. Gun salutes originated at a time when cannons took a long time to reload. Effectively it was a demonstration that you were arriving unarmed and in peace. Kings and Heads of State were given 21 gun salutes; Lower ranking officials had fewer guns, but they were always an odd number.

“Tangier is an International City ruled by nine nations. The International Area extends for about 8 miles around and includes the city and the harbour. The French frigate 729 SAKALVE was at anchor about half way between us and the shore. The main impression of the city was one of rather modern buildings in blocks on the outskirts with a jumble of buildings in the ancient Arab quarter. We were told that the threat of the last war had made a number of countries build banks in the city in order to deposit their gold reserves there. Only Beirut had more.

Weds 24th Nov. In the morning we went pulling round the ship in a cutter. [The cutter was larger than a whaler but have similar design. There were 10 oarsmen seated on pairs. They were the main life boats in larger ships and could carry up to 40 passengers.]

There was a swell causing the aircraft carrier to pitch about four feet. I was one of three spare hands left to stow the cutter's stowing gear, in other words the ropes and pulleys for raising and lowering the boat from its davits which in turn had to be swung outwards so that the cutter would not hit the side of the ship. We had to get aboard via a broken rope ladder and a long boat rope. Two of us had a most exasperating trapeze act on the end getting somewhat damp in the process.

In the afternoon it was our turn to go ashore in our smartest uniforms. As we approached the jetty, the stink of Arab cigars and filth assailed us and, on stepping ashore, we were surrounded by grubby individuals in flowing garments and fezzes or small skullcaps who were determined to be our guides. “You want Kasbah? Follow I show you. You like f--? Me your friend, I show you everything.” We thrust our way past and up into the Arab quarter pursued by a persistent four.

“I have never met so much colour; vice; variety; grubbiness and fascination crammed into such a small area. We were accosted at every turn by Arabs offering glaring goods at exorbitant prices. We became quite practiced at bargaining and towards the end of the day bought the odd wallet and other leather goods. We had an excellent meal for 50 pesetas and finally arrived back on board almost broke. The variety of dress is incredible and the Arab women all wear veils. I must say that the flowing garments with pairs of smiling warm brown eyes peeping out at the top were very attractive.

Thurs 25th Nov. I had my first duty as motorboats crew. The controls of the boat are very simple. There are two engines amidships, each has its own clutch for forwards and reverse and a lever type accelerator on the dashboard. The wheel is amidships. A turn is executed by revving the starboard engine forward and the port engine in reverse. A very manoeuvrable craft.

Fri 26th Nov. On my second and last run ashore, we were taken on a bus trip arranged by a Mrs Burgess [too, too British right down to the tweed suit and woollen stockings.] We went at a hair-raising speed through the main thoroughfares and up to the top of the highest hill in the region. It was the site of the French radio station. The view was enthralling. We could see right down the Straits of Gibraltar though it was shrouded in gloom. Down to the south we could see miles and miles to the foothills to the Atlas Mountains. The land around was very rocky with the result that the plants were all very xerophytes - *heathers*, succulents and an expandable palm like plant. [When conditions were favourable, it expands out fanwise. When not, it is closed.] There were also dwarf oaks. There are patches of levelled terraced land bearing crops; herds of goats and scraggy Jersey type cows somehow finding sustenance in the unforrested areas and the odd flock of white and brown sheep. The south Atlantic washed up on the beach below us and Spain was away to the north, the span of sea *between* being peppered with ships.

There was a cocktail party held in “B” Hanger in the evening. The nine Consul Generals and their Military Attaches came. The more distinguished British residents and some Muslims were invited. The officers of two square rigged Swedish Training schooners also came. The ships were on an extensive tour and were bound for the West Indies. Our senior class was shown over the training schooners next day and amongst other things they had to climb up over the mast. We had a messmate, Birch, who's mother was Norwegian and he was called upon to show a group of their cadets around HMS Theseus.

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At 1550, during a lecture on pay, we weighed anchor and steamed out of the bay bound for Great Britain. The weather forecast promised hurricane force winds in the Bay of Biscay.

In the evening I took part in a very unrehearsed concert. John Stubbs, a fellow NSUY and an accomplished pianist and raconteur, had composed a calypso with words about our short stay in Southern latitudes. The last four lines were sung with great gusto: -

“Tonight you’ll find me,
Leaning out of my mick,
With a pea green face
And feeling sick.”

[mick in this context, was short for hammock.]

Hurricane in the Bay of Biscay

Sun 28th Nov. In the morning those memorable lines came true, we were rolling very considerably and a large number of NSUYs felt very ill, and the greater part of these were completely out of action. Morning service on the quarterdeck was cancelled and divisions were held in the hanger. The squad drill was fatuous in these conditions and on several occasions a whole division would slide across the deck with a devastating result. The wind force increased and we steered a course well in towards Portugal. There was a following sea and wind all across the Bay. The spray was whipped off the tops of the white horses and flung back onto the sea causing a snowy froth and at times the wind force reached a hurricane, force 12. The strongest gust recorded was force 13. The ship was constantly being swung off course by the swell and the roll reached a maximum of 29degrees to one side. The weather decks e.g. the anchor cable deck in the bow were closed later in the day and life in the mess deck was at times comical. At one stage all the chaps eating their meal slid gracefully down their bench, the plates keeping pace with everything ending in a heap on the deck, everyone laughing hysterically.

The gales were extremely severe all around the coast of Britain and our instructor on W/T said that he had never heard so many distress signals. On the news we heard that the tanker “World Concord” had split in two in the Irish Sea. The Goodwin Lightship broke loose from her moorings and was smashed on the rocks. There were no survivors.

All today’s evolutions including the Atomic Shelter Stations practice were cancelled. Towards evening the wind lessened but the sea was still high. All the ships at Portland had had to ride out the storm in the bay. Chesil Beach, stretching between Weymouth and Portland had been breached thirty times during the weekend.

Tues 30th Nov. At 0030 we anchored in Torbay where there were at least 15 merchant ships at anchor.

Today was Sir Winston Churchill’s 80th birthday. He was presented with his portrait in Westminster Hall and both Mr Attlee and Lord Salisbury gave him very warm praising speeches. He replied saying that he felt deeply proud that this honour should be bestowed upon him and yet he felt very humble.

Weds 1st Dec. We weighed anchor at 0830 and steamed slowly south to join in with a large-scale minesweeping exercise. In this exercise, several minesweepers took up position ahead and either side of the convoy of large ships of which we were a part. They used a variety of minesweeping devices to clear a path through a suspected minefield. There were a wide variety of mines to consider - acoustic; pressure; magnetic and mines held on a wire just below the surface of the sea. The sea was flat calm in contrast with the recent weather.

“At 1000 we did a speed trial – the engine telegraphs were put to Full Ahead and from then on the engine room used all the tricks of the trade to build up the revolutions. Originally HMS Theseus could do an official top speed of 24 knots. In the trial she topped 24.5 knots and she is now 8 years old, so the engines have been very well maintained.”

A day on a submarine

Thurs 2nd Dec. At 0745 “494” Class mustered at the port forward gangway prepared for a day on HM Submarines. My party of 8 boarded HMS Solent. This had been streamlined and had an additional

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ASDIC 138 set protected *by a* dome forward was used when the submarine was lying on the bottom. She was also fitted with an experimental, single man escape apparatus that was being tested at depths of 300ft. We slipped moorings at 0830 and moved out to the exercise area. We were allotted diving stations to help keep the trim of the boat level and then dived. Two honks on the Claxton indicated this. We levelled off at 80ft and glided around trying to evade the frigates searching for us up above.

The motion when on the surface was very rough, but as soon as we dived, all rolling ceased and a very remarkable silence settled around us. We were shown all over the boat; allowed to listen in on the asdic sets to the churning of the ships propellers above us and also allowed to handle the hydroplane controls with the aid of a spirit level to keep the boat on the horizontal.

Several of our group decided that they would like to join HM Submarines. "I shall definitely not join them." My reasons for not wanting to be a submariner included a sense of claustrophobia when submerged; the lack of fresh air; potential problems when escaping; the inability to see anything outside and the need to be on exceptionally good terms with your shipmates. I found the submarine to be very unsteady on the surface. While clearly there was a great future role for submarines but they were not for me.

At 1400 four grenades were dropped near our hull and we surfaced and returned to Portland. A most interesting and informative trip.

Fri 3rd Dec. Another very cold day. We went through our sword drill and were detailed off as guard officers for the following week.

The Captain's cake

Sat 4th Dec. We were presented with the Captain's Cake, which was shared out with the whole mess deck. This was the second time that the NSUY Mess had won the cake aboard HMS Theseus. [The Captain's Cake was presented to the Mess that had the best overall standard at the Captain's tour of inspection]. We had competed with all the other Messes on the ship and felt very pleased with ourselves.

Divisions were held in "B" Hanger and the Captain included the NSUYs in his tour of inspection and asked several questions. I went ashore at 1330 and several of us had tea and supper at Dorchester.

Mon 6th Dec. I had a duty aboard the motor cutter which required me to handle the bow ropes; use a boat hook to steady the cutter when alongside, and push the boat off when leaving a pier or gangway. The wind was quite strong. We brought the commanders of five frigates to HMS Theseus. "We also made a routine trip to Camber Pier and an instructor Lieutenant had the misfortune of misjudging his footing and sliding down into the "oggin" [sea]".

Weds 8th Dec. A class of 18 Air Cadets arrived today. This meant that there are now 74 men using the 3 heads [toilets]; 6 basins and 3 showers.

I was the Guard Officer. There was a guard of ten men and we marched onto the quarterdeck and took up a position as far aft as we could. Arms were presented from the shoulder. I felt more confident than usual. Rear Admiral B Bryant DSO; DSC. Director of Naval Training made a tour of inspection of the ship in the afternoon.

The wind increased to Force 8 from the SW and a majority of the ships in the harbour secured to buoys including the submarines.

Scarborough lifeboat disaster

We heard the horrible news that the Scarborough Lifeboat, after patrolling for five hours, had come back to harbour where a large wave overturned her. When she righted herself, three of the crew were missing. They all died. This is the worst calamity to happen there since 1861.

Fri 10th Dec. Capt ACC Miers, VC.DSO and Bar, came onboard to prepare to take over command from Capt Browne, CBE. We had our last day of instruction before seasonal leave.

Christmas 1954

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I spent Christmas at home in Thornton le Dale. At the end of the holiday, Dad drove me to York and I travelled by train to Weymouth, sleeping almost the whole way down with weariness due to feeding too well and lacking sleep.

HMS Bulwark - an addition to the Fleet

HMS Bulwark, the sister ship to the aircraft carrier HMS Centaur was finally commissioned. She has the new angled flight deck designed to avoid aircraft that misjudge their landing on deck from crashing into planes waiting to take off in the bow.

After a late start, the routine got back to normal. There were a large number of RNVR School and University Ratings doing their annual training on board and they had been told to use our washrooms. There are now 50 ratings per "head". [In the days for sailing ships, sailors would relieve themselves on the leeward side of the bows of the ship close to the bowsprit. This area became known as the heads.]

Fri 31st Dec. I was the NSUY on watch with Lt Parker. An RNVR Rating joined us and I was detailed off to give him a rough idea of how the ship was steered. These jobs to explain to someone else a piece of equipment are of great value. You have to know what you are talking about, and I spent a considerable time revising the telemotor system before describing what happened.

New Year 1955

At 2400, sixteen bells were rung – eight for the old year and 8 for the new. Our Scottish members managed to keep awake to welcome the New Year in.

Fri 7th Jan. We were given instruction in the manoeuvring of the motor cutter when coming alongside and going away from a pier or ship. The Kitchener steering gear had been fitted making the boat extremely manoeuvrable for its single right-handed propeller. This was a most instructive afternoon reaffirming that one had joined the best service.

Course instruction

Sat 8th Jan. Oriordan and I were the Upper Yardmen of the Watch for the First and Last Dogwatch periods with Lt Dowle. My Journal records a detailed moan about the standard of teaching on the course. "Everyone seems to take the attitude Well its all in the book, I don't really see that I need to explain but here is a rough outline of what is indicated – and it was very rough."

"What have I learnt so far on the training ship? From being a raw schoolboy, I have come to understand the importance of discipline. At first the daily routine seemed designed to annoy one. The fearful early rise, periods of intense boredom followed by a hive of activity, the constant 'honeying' [washing clothes], but now it has become a series of conditioned reflexes. I think I have learnt a little bit about the mind of "Jack Tar" and his ways: his attitudes towards his officers, ship and equipment, messmates, women and drink. I have learnt methods of gaining confidence in myself "as taught in squad drill" and of how everything is done by the QR and AI [Queen's Regulations and Admiralty Instructions.] book. We have been given glimpses into the worlds of TAS; gunnery; communications; electrics; the working of the Admiralty and many more. If one passes this Board, one is only just on the fringe of the Navy proper. We will lack experience, of course, and this is what will have to be learnt in the next year and a half."

[The officer supervising my Journal chose not to comment on this entry. The Captain's summary at the end of the Course read, "I enjoyed both the sketches and the written matter."]

Weds 12th Jan. This evening we held the last Upper Yardmen Parliament. The Motion –"That this house believes that when science walks in by the door, Enchantment flies out by the window." I was the second speaker for the opposition.

After supper, we acted as middlemen between the cooks and the Royal Marine waiters at a Wardroom Guest night. At times it was very boring, "watching the lions eat", but we did pick up the odd detail of procedure.

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American Military service

Fri 14th Jan. President Eisenhower announced that young Americans between the ages of 18 and 19 would be called up for two years full time military service. Up until now only specially selected men had been required to do service. The new system would be very like the British system of National Service, which has been going for eight years.

Thurs 20th Jan. The class ahead of us, "493" Class are now in the middle of exams and the tension has risen.

Fri 21st Jan. The Inter Mess Cross Country Running competition was held today even though there was a thick fog. Roger Murray came second out of 150 men and the NSUYs won the team award.

Guest night

Mon 24th Jan. I was the Upper Yardman of the Watch on the starboard after gangway from 1900-2115. The Admiral was entertaining a number of guests and they all arrived at prearranged times. - 1945 the Ladies; 1955 the Captain and Commander of HMS Ocean; 2005 the C in C Home Fleet and some of his Staff. [The reply to his boat hail was "Flag Tyne." The uniforms worn were rather old fashioned - a hangover from a previous age. All the officers wore tails on their monkey jackets and the visiting officers had cloaks extending to the knee.

Weds 26th Jan. "493" Class had their final interviews with the Board. One man had failed outright; one was back classed to Ocean due to low written exam results and all the rest passed.

Visit to Brest

Thurs 27th Jan. At 1330 we sailed for Brest in France. During the crossing, the Vice Admiral was transferred to and from HMS Tyrian by light jackstay. [As previously described using a sack of potatoes].

At 0815 the Pilot vessel came alongside. Brest is a land locked harbour with additional piers built out for added shelter.

At 0915 we passed through the harbour breakwater and with all the ratings lining the guardrails fired a 21 gun National Salute.

At 0930 we dropped the motor-cutter with the picking up rope, but a French vessel and buoy jumpers beat us to the buoy.

The French Navy ships in harbour included the new battleship "Jean Barte" which in addition to the usual eight 15inch guns in pairs [A; B; X and Y turrets] had nine 6 inch; twenty four 3.0inch; twenty eight 57mm and twenty Oerlicons, 89 guns in all. Her top speed is 32 knots. The two cruisers the De Grasse and the Georges Leygues and three destroyers were also present.

Fri 28th Jan. In the evening, the ship threw a cocktail party for about 500 guests. All officers were piped on and off the ship. It was a great success although the anthems played were a little shaky.

Sat 29th Jan. I was lucky enough to be on a specially arranged bus tour of Brittany. We landed at 1000 and drove south through Quimper and Concarneau where we lunched on wine, rolls and steak. It was fascinating seeing all the quaint costumes, clogs and lace. Brest was almost all new buildings *as* the town had been badly damaged during the last war. All the little townships on our route were quite intact with coloured stone round all the windows and doors. The sea comes right inland in places in the form of creeks and bays. The trip just wetted one's appetite for more. We returned at 2015.

Sun 30th Jan. From 1400 to 1800 the ship was open to visitors [along a set route]. All sorts of people came aboard including out equivalent of National Service Upper Yardmen. They have 30 months to do and are paid five shillings a month. We were slightly better paid and of course the cost of living was much less than it is today. One good restaurant in Brest advertised that a customer could order as many courses on the menu as he liked for just two pounds.

We managed to get a game of deck hockey in the afternoon versus the Gunroom. They won 11-10. Very good fun.

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End of Course exams

“In the next week we will work up towards the exams and hope to pass. I wonder how many of us will make the grade?”

The Journal ends, temporarily, at this point but I remember the stress leading up to being told the result. The whole class waited outside the Examination Boards quarters in some trepidation. Traditionally, a candidate *who* had failed was called in first. I was called in first. Captain Miers, chairman of the Board, gave a very critical summary of my efforts giving me the impression that I had done really badly – despair must have registered on my face. At the end of his comments, he looked directly at me and said that in spite of all that, they had decided I had passed – but only just. The expression of relief on my face must have been memorable because all the Board Members seemed very pleased with themselves for having given me such a fright. [I suspect that they had devised this as a practical joke at my expense.] In fact the whole Class passed.

Class celebrations

From then on things happened at lightning speed. We were doled out with a Casual Payment of ten pounds, very welcome, then kitting up and sewing on of cap badges all before the 1730 boat. We managed to persuade all the Petty Officers to come out for a “piss up” when they became very sad and happy at the same time. Lt Cdr Hanrahan and Lt Dowle accepted an invitation to a very good meal with wine at the Royal Hotel, in Weymouth.

The following morning we packed and returned kit and by 1030 were on the flight deck in our Number 2s [our best uniform.] for a photograph. Then a pep talk from the Captain including the importance of Officer’s reports; 1200 drinks in the Wardroom where we said our adieus and at 1230 we piled into the pinnacle with the baggage party and after the usual bustle, got to Weymouth Station. Only six of us managed to catch the London train, the others lacking the required teamwork.

We were now National Service Midshipmen [RNVR] with white flashes and a Naval button on the lapels and a row of buttons on the sleeves just above the wrists. This latter tradition was because so many very young officers in the past had a habit of wiping their noses on their sleeves and Midshipmen were known as “snotties” as a result.

Shortly after we had returned from Gibraltar, we had been sent ashore to Gieves, the officers’ outfitters based on the front at Weymouth. In anticipation of us being successful at the end of the Training Course we needed to be measured up for our new uniforms. I had never been to a bespoke tailor before and found the whole exercise fascinating. As I remember it, there were two fittings. The final result was very fine, double-breasted blue/black jacket over a white shirt with a starched collar and black tie. The collars had to be sent off to Collars Limited for laundering before a cheaper version of disposable white cardboard collar was introduced.

My first posting

After a brief holiday, we were all dispersed to ships around the world. One of our number is said to have used his influence with a friend of the family who worked at the Admiralty Appointments Board. He was posted to a frigate stationed in the West Indies and had a wonderful time.

On Feb 23rd, my own appointment came through the post. My new ship was a Castle Class frigate – HMS Carisbrooke Castle and she was stationed at Londonderry in Northern Ireland. “Join the Navy to see the World.” – well N Ireland could just be said to be called foreign.

In 1955 there were no major problems with the IRA although the Duty Officer had access to a service revolver and live ammunition. The Royal Navy still had a major base in the city with seven destroyers or frigates, the submarine depot ship and three submarines alongside the harbour wall. Further out to sea lay five ships of the 3rd Training Squadron. Londonderry was also a flourishing mercantile marine port and small freighters were constantly coming and going. Nestle’s seemed to own quite a large fleet to ferry their products to Europe and the Baltic.

“HMS Carisbrooke Castle was tied up alongside the crane and upstream of the dry dock in which the dredger was undergoing repairs. She looked splendid to my enthusiastic eye, a ship that did the Navy credit; the other eye saw her as an ageing, out of date, under armed but well designed warship of the type featured in the book “The cruel sea” by Monsarrat. She had been built towards the end of the

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war for service with the Atlantic convoys. She was the smallest of the frigates, 265 ft long and about 1000 tons in weight. She had a complement of 80 ratings and six officers. The Captain was Lt Cdr Lancaster; the Navigating Officer Lt Fitch, a man who eventually rose to the rank of Admiral. The other Mid on board was Bill Hunt. We became very close friends.

The ship had been fitted with the economical triple reciprocating engines, which meant a top speed of only 16 knots – cruising speed 12 knots. Her main armament was one Squid making her an anti submarine frigate; One 4 inch hand operated gun; two Bofors guns [hand operated] and two Oerlikon guns. “Total value in this jet age as far as the guns were concerned, nil!”

Two days after I arrived, we sailed and a pilot was taken aboard as we cruised up the buoyed channel into Lough Foyle. At the “toe” of the Lough lay Lisahally with its barnacled wooden piers, and some of the frigates of the reserve fleet. These included HMS Amethyst, nicely patched up after her adventures in China and in mothballs.

“The view as we crept gingerly up the very narrow channel, was really magnificent, with the gold tinted highlands sweeping down to cool their “soles” in the lucent luminous Lough beneath.”

Exercises in the Irish Sea

Our duties were various the most frequent being that of Safety Vessel for aircraft based at the Royal Naval Air Station of Eglington while they were night flying. This involved steady patrolling up and down a line in Area GG and keeping in radio contact with the air station in case an aircraft ditched,

The other main duty was concerned with the new technique of following the movements of submerged submarines with the help of sonobuoys. An aircraft, usually a Firefly, would meet us at an agreed grid position and then fly off in search of a submarine. She would then send a “Flash report” – Submarine sighted grid position -****- and she has dived. The aircraft would then drop a master sonobuoy and a smoke flare followed by a pattern of other sonobuoys in order to detect the direction the submarine was steering. On reaching the last sonobuoy to be dropped, we usually obtained an echo on our Asdic set and chased the sub. In a successful attack, we would drop 3 grenades on top of her and she was supposed to release a green smoke float. After a last attack, we would settle down to a safety course due north and drop one grenade to surface the submarine. She then turned to her safety course and surfaced. We then went back and picked up all the sonobuoys. The sonobuoys were just hydrophones picking up the sound of propellers and the observer in the aircraft, having plotted where the sonobuoys had been dropped, would calculate where the submarine was. Another exercise involved dropping live depth charges onto an orange and red target towed astern. Fireflies made attacks from all angles trying to hit it. While there were several narrow escapes, the float target always seemed to re emerge from the erupting water. A patrol boat came out with us that day to pick up the large number of concussed fish floating on the surface, their eyes popping due to the huge pressure.

On occasions we had some magnificent views towards Scotland with the mountains covered with snow. The gulls [or "shite hawks"] *{a term crossed out by my mentor with the words “this type of slang is out}* were ever with us riding the slip stream with perfect ease. “In fact on most days it felt good to be alive.”

We went down to Derry at the weekends and indulged in big eats ashore to supplement our meagre rations. We met up with the pilots that we had been working with on the Saturday and had a return visit on the Sunday. We were told that there was a problem with modern jets like the Hunter. They were unable to fire their guns and rockets, as this would interfere with the airflow to the engines, to such an extent that they just cut out and sometimes exploded.

My general opinion of the pilot officers that I met onboard or in the Wardroom at Eglington was that they were either married, in which case they lived in terror of their wives, or else they were bachelors drowning their sorrows at the weekend and often ending up in the ditch. They always seemed to be able to fly on the following day.

The Naval establishments in the vicinity were looked upon as unnecessary commitments by the N Ireland Constabulary as they were a source of temptation for the Sinn Feiners across the border and even during the short time I was over there, there were two armed raids. Their philosophy seems to be “What’s the Government? I’m agin it.”

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My own duties on board included being in charge of the Wardroom drinks supply. The most popular drinks were gin and tonic using Plymouth Gin and “horses necks” which were brandy and dry ginger ale. A tot of brandy was 2 [old] pence and the ginger ale 3p. The favourite tabletop game – liar dice. The loser usually had to buy a round of drinks.

There were not enough bunks for the officers, so, as the junior, I had to sling my hammock every night just outside the wardroom.

In March we sailed down to Devonport to prepare for our refit and to facilitate Easter leave. As we were rounding Cornwall and heading towards the Lizard Light, the funnel fumes were blown down into the open bridge making life extremely unpleasant.

Plymouth

Plymouth from the sea looked particularly pleasant, in fact unspoilt seems an apt word. At 0900 hands fell in for entering harbour with yours truly right aft in charge of the quarterdeck. We glided across the Sound and round Drake Island obtaining an excellent view of the Hoe, then while rounding another bend, suddenly the salute went. I gave the requisite order automatically, to stand to attention, while searching the sea and the cliffs for an object worth saluting. A camouflaged “Green Parrot” [slang for an Admirals barge,] rode at anchor beneath the cliff and high up on the latter beside a small green hut stood two “pigmy sized” men – an officer and a rating. This turned out to be the saluting position of Mount Wise, the abode of C in C Plymouth.

From then on we were constantly saluting, RAF Rescue Launch; Flagstaff steps; HMS Sparrow; HMS Launceston Castle our sister ship which would be going up to Derry after leave. We finally tied up alongside HMS Launceston Castle and almost immediately HMS Subtle, a newly fitted “S” Class submarine secured alongside. My old classmate Mid Peter Cousins was on her after casing, so we had a short session “over the garden wall” catching up with our recent experiences.

HMS Cumberland was still refitting and was about to try out a quick firing, automatic, radar-controlled gun as an answer to the jet age. HMS Eagle was also in and I had the doubtful pleasure of being shown round her. NB the sills of the doors were 2ft high. The size of the Ops Room on the bridge was enormous in fact the whole impression was that of a floating aerodrome.

HMS Vanguard, the only battleship in the fleet, was undergoing a refit in 10 dock.

The following morning we passed up the Hamoaze and secured to a buoy for “de-ammunitioning.” Really quite hard work and slightly nerve racking as I have a profound respect for live ammunition, most especially the Squid. We finished quite early and were taken by tug to No 2 wharf where we berthed alongside HMS Launceston Castle.

When going out of harbour yesterday, we were passed by HMS Battleaxe with her “paying off pennant” flying. Two scarlet balloons floated at the end to prevent the pennant from falling into the water. All the crew were “fallen in” in No 3s and a Sub Lt with body bowed determinedly against the wind gave the impression of unutterable keenness on the forecastle.

During the next few Days, we were de-fuelled and had our tanks cleaned by HMS Sivettia, using steam and Teepol. She burns the fuel filtered off. We rose about 3ft out of the water as a result and developed a distinct list to port. I suspect that there had been more weight above the water line on one side than the other. The list only developed when all the tanks were empty.

Mon 4th Apr. The tug Superman secured alongside. Then HMS Launceston Castle took off the wires that had secured her to HMS Sparrow that is all but one. The tug surged ahead before this wire had been cast off and all our wires groaned aloud. In the nick of time the wire was released and the trio of ships was taken out to No 6 buoy. Tug Superman then took HMS Carisbrooke Castle to the entrance of No 3 Basin. The caisson was removed and numerous wires passed in board. A little man with red and yellow flags and a whistle took up his station high up on the superstructure and by simple actions, controlled the heaving in and wearing of the ropes. The result was that, having missed the bows of HMS St Austell Bay by inches, we secured alongside the north wall.

Dry dock

Filth and gash covered the dockside; broken lockers; piles of wood; metal tubing; a broken down travelling crane and to cap it all a filthy gangway. We were now invaded by a hoard of Dockyard

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“Mateys”. The middle-aged men were few in number and in fact were the only men who worked hard. It came out that the Dockyard was obliged to keep a certain number of men on their books to be able to cope with the vast amount of refitting which would be required if an emergency arose. As a result, a job that could be done by one man in a day was allotted to five with the same amount of time allocated.

May 8th. I returned from leave to find the ship propped up in the bottom of No 3 Dock in South Yard. The anchor cable was removed for testing; the 4in gun mounting dismantled; all the boats removed; the fire main taken out and some protection rails added for the descent to the quarterdeck. Mid Bill Hunt had a draft to HMS Apollo, which was about to set out on a “showing the Flag” cruise to the Scandinavian countries. He was not too happy about the change but subsequently had a wonderful trip.

HMS Teazer

Sat 14th May. Whilst HMS Carisbrooke Castle was in dry dock, I had nothing to do, so it was arranged that I should join HMS Teazer in Cardiff. She was half way through her commissioning trial having had an enclosed bridge added on.

On the first evening, the Captain, Cdr Watson and 1st Lt went, in full regalia, to the rechristening of the RNVR Minesweeper Miner VII. Capt Beatty, VC came down from the Admiralty for the ceremony and they all came back on board with the Commodore of the RNVR Division “Flying Fox”. The latter knew another old NSUY Messmate Tony Williams very well.

The following day, we moved out of the Queen Alexandra Basin with the assistance of a tug. Then into a lock where we descended to sea level. The wind was broadside on so the captain decided to rush out full speed ahead to avoid a collision. I was Navigator’s yeoman and was kept writing frantically until we were well out into the bay. I had to keep the log of all the signals that had been sent and received. No automated print out at that time. During the speed trial in the Bristol Channel we built up to 33knots. That night we anchored off Barry. The tides and wind were far too strong for comfort and so we had to keep anchor watches.

The specialists from the dockyard were all over us until Tuesday when the final conferences were held and the D448 was signed. [The D448 was the official document that had to be signed by all parties to confirm that the Dockyard had handed the ship back to the Navy with all work completed to everyone's satisfaction.] All parted company with light hearts; it must be quite a relief to be free of the dockyard for a while.

We sailed for Plymouth on a really beautiful morning and did our de gauging-ranging in Cawsand bay to minimise the effect of the ships own magnetism on compasses and other instruments.

After the last run, we moved up the Hamoaze and secured to No 8 buoy, just abeam of HMS Ark Royal. During the next few days we ammunitioned; oiled and stored the ship and I had the opportunity of driving the motor boat which had one of the first air cooled engines in the Service.

Fri 20th May. HMS Illustrious, an obsolete aircraft carrier, glided past us in a very sorry state on her way to the breakers yard.

Tues 23rd May. We sailed for Portland. I was made the coxswain of the motorboat for when we were securing to ahead and astern buoys. A Mess dinner, the first of the Commission, rounded off a most enjoyable day.

Coastal fog descended on us the following afternoon and I had my first experience of ship handling in fog. Lookouts were posted on the wings of the bridge but not in the eyes of the ship. Visibility was about one mile. The Radar sets 974 and 277 were watched continually and ships within five miles of us plotted. [The numbers relate to the particular model of radar set.] We maintained a speed of 12knots.

Sat 1st Jun. Navy Days were upon us although we were not open to visitors. A helicopter operating from HMS Ark Royal made several demonstrations of rescuing people from the sea using the new scoop life saving net. It works very well.

The midget submarine HMS Stickleback went through her paces and the MTB [motor torpedo boat] Gay Charioteer fired her Boffor gun and torpedoes. [This was in the days before a section of the male

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community had hijacked the word "Gay".] The events were rounded off with a PT [Physical Training] display at the barracks and the "Beating of the retreat" with the band of the Royal Marines.

Back to Plymouth.

Thurs 6th Jun. I returned to HMS Carisbrooke Castle, which was still undergoing her refit. The dockyard "mateys" were still on board although the major jobs are finished.

Jun 8th. The main engines of the ship were given their second trial today. We were firmly held between the dockside and HMS Anzio. The following day we carried out an engine trial out at sea beyond the breakwater of Plymouth Sound and found that there was still a knock in the medium pressure piston, which had been present before the refit. It was due to misalignment. However the defect was accepted.

Jun 16th. Fog delayed our departure for Portland but it cleared about midday allowing us to do our six runs over the DG Range. [DG is short for De Gauzing]

At Portland we secured to No 7 berth just aft of HMS Brockelsby. She has an Asdic that can give the length and shape of a submarine at 10 miles compared with our set, which only has a range of 2 miles on a good day. HMS Undaunted came into harbour at 1700 and secured alongside HMS Tyrian. Midshipman Hodges Roper was on board and had some tales to tell concerning Malta and our mutual friends.

Next morning 8 junior RAF officers came aboard to see an anti submarine exercise. We worked with the submarine HMS Untiring and the frigate HMS Tyrian. We tracked the submarine and made dummy attacks on the same but, as luck would have it, the Asdic equipment became temperamental and broke down at the critical moment.

Two of us were in harbour at the weekend and obtained permission to take the ship's dinghy away for a sail. We were very lucky because the wind got up and we were able to sail to Weymouth and back.

Next day we joined HMS Leeds Castle trying to sink a mine that had been seen floating off Portland Bill. Eventually after trying rifle shots, Boffor shots and Oerlikon shots at long and then close range, the mine sank. In the evening we secured to buoys. I was at last permitted to be coxswain of the motorboat as the previous coxswain, a leading seaman, had crushed a rib between the boat and the ship's side on the previous buoy securing expedition.

Thurs 23rd Jun. "The conning tower of HMS Sidon rose to the surface again today. A few days earlier, a secret list torpedo on board for its first trial, exploded. A large number of the crew were saved but 13 lives were lost."

One day, while doing joint exercises with the RAF Meteors from Culdrose, we towed a splash target. The splashes flecked up around the target at the same time as the sound of the firing cracked out of the sky. The firing was extremely accurate and the links on the towing wire were severely damaged.

Visit to Arcachon

Jul 1st. 1955 At 1900 we sailed for France in company with HMS Launceston Castle, for a "showing the flag" visit. At 0600 we raised the bar outside Arcachon near Bordeaux and embarked the pilot shortly afterwards. We had to con our way through a very narrow channel of about a mile in length. We anchored close to the main beach in front of the town. Almost immediately, both captains went ashore to visit the Mayors of the area and they in turn paid a return visit. In the evening there was a reception. The following afternoon, all the officers went ashore leaving me in complete charge of the "children's party" for the orphans of Aerium. The sailors dressed up in pirates rig and gave the little lads and lasses a very happy afternoon. The raid by the pirates was a great success and I think the children were all reluctant to go below for a film show and tea.

The five Sisters, including the Mother Superior, would not take any refreshment though the heat was terrific. In the evening, the Exshaws, English brandy people, gave a cocktail party at their villa. I met a most interesting young New Zealand doctor and his wife.

Jul 6th. I went on a car trip to Bordeaux with the Vice Consul and also visited the Exshaws cognac establishment. The Consul had a little party in his garden and one and all became very merry. Two

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days later, at 0900, we embarked the pilot and proceeded out of the bay. Kerchiefs fluttered from windows along the front.

HMS Launceston Castle had to wait until a prisoner had been released. We suspected that he had been drinking too much and there had been a local incident, which meant that he had been put in jail by the gendarmerie. She sailed in the evening. The customs officers came aboard as soon as we arrived back in Plymouth and were particularly severe.

Jul 11th. Off Falmouth. Eleven young RAF pilots with a WREN in charge came aboard to practice being picked up from the sea by helicopter using the scoop net method. They jumped into the water from the motorboat and went through their survival drill which ended up with them paddling around in their inflated dinghy. They had to jump into the sea and the helicopter then scooped them out and brought them back to the ship one at a time.

Showing the Flag at Brixham and Seaton

A few days later we sailed to first Brixham and then Seaton on official "showing the flag" visits. There was a strong wind blowing when we arrived off Seaton and our anchor dragged. We tried a position nearer the shore and the anchor held. The beach was composed of very large pebbles and the bottom shelved steeply down to a considerable depth.

They laid on an extensive sports and civic reception programme and at one stage I met George Bernard Shaw's great friend St John Ervin. He was a most *entertaining* personality with surprisingly conservative views.

On our return to Plymouth I met two RNVR Midshipman aboard HMS Sparrow. They are just about to depart for South Africa but they envied the amount of work I had to do.

During the second leave period in August, I acted up as Officer of the Day with strict instructions to refer anything the least unusual to the captain. "Self diagnosis showed that I became very much surer of myself, feeling almost necessary, when this responsibility was laid upon me. Also, perhaps more aggressive with less inclination to pass pleasantries with the National Servicemen who had failed their Boards, but in all other respects, were like unto myself." Subsequent conversations with other National Service Midshipmen confirmed the impression that young officers with too little to do were tempted to fraternise too much with sailors on the "lower deck."

Back to N Ireland

Mon 15th Aug. Lt Cdr Wainwright RN, the present 1st Lt of HMS Barfleur came on board with his wife before taking over command. The general opinion of all-present was that the change would be for the better.

[Inevitably some commanding officers were respected more than others. A man who led by example and could be seen to be fair and competent was held in higher regard than one who avoided speaking to his men; kept himself to himself; was obsessed with trivial detail and perhaps was prone to secret drinking. Such men were spotted early by the appraisal system in operation and they rarely rose above the rank of Lieutenant Commander].

There were several changes in the regular officers and at the end of August we sailed for Londonderry again with a new Captain and First Lt. The ships programme up to Christmas would be much as before, working with the Fleet Air Arm and chasing submarines with the help of sonobuoys.

The method adopted for recovering the sonobuoys was to stop the ship to windward of the buoy and recover it from the quarterdeck. We acted as safety vessel for the night flying and also a vessel that had to be found using the new "glow-worm" technique. The magnesium flare was dropped on a parachute from the aircraft and once it was lit and falling slowly down, it illuminated a large area of sea. The aircraft would then do dummy attack runs while we were silhouetted against the light.

Mon 4th Sept, I was in charge of the fixing of the ship and keeping to the patrol line. The exercises finished at 2300 and we were anchored of Moville at 0130.

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Thus 8th Sept. There were 4 LJX9 antisubmarine exercises scheduled, but unfortunately “our Asdic set had fallen over” so we were only able to co-operate to a limited extent. The next week we sailed for Portland to take part in NATO exercises before returning via Plymouth to Londonderry.

On our next exercise off Ireland, our Asdic 145 and 147 ceased to work in the prescribed manner, which meant we spent our time finding and picking up sonobuoys.

The aircraft carriers HMS Eagle and HMS Albion were operating in the adjoining areas to us. They provided a great source of interest and scrutiny. Their Sea Hawks were firing at targets towed astern and a helicopter stood by whenever aircraft were flying off or on.

Islay

Thurs 15th Sept. We had an afternoon without exercises so the captain took the opportunity of setting course for the Loch at Islay. We anchored off Port Charlotte, and at once lowered the whaler. The crew were three quarters RNVR and I was the coxswain. It was a hard pull against the wind up to Port Bruchladdish where the village surrounds the whisky distillery. All too soon we had to sail back for night flying exercises.

Capstan failure

At 1330 next afternoon, just as we were hauling in the anchor, the shaft of the capstan with the main gearing cogs on broke and the cable ran out again. We had to prepare tackles for weighing anchor by hand and cleared the lower deck to provide the manpower. After an hour, with the help of the quarterdeck winch, the anchor had been hauled in and we were secured for sea. On examination, only one inch of the two and half-inch shaft had been holding the cable and this had fractured through metal fatigue.

On Saturday morning, on our way down to Plymouth, Action Stations were sounded and three light Squid were fired, after some delay. I took the whaler away to recover them. On slipping the boat lifting gear, only the stern hook released landing us on top of a wave and drenching us. The fault was rectified.

As an officer in training, I was required to practice using a sextant to pin point our position at sea. It was an extraordinarily difficult procedure and the sun sight measurement required the use of complex mathematical calculation using the Admiralty tables and a special chronometer. My sun sights were moderately accurate. This was all years before satellite navigation was available.

There was excellent visibility and at one time in the evening Pendeen Head; Longships; Lizard; Wolf Rock; Seven Stones and the Scilly Isles light were all visible at the same time.

Back at Devonport, the Type 145 and 147 sonar sets were repaired.

Admiral's inspection

Tues 20th Sep. Official inspection by Admiral Sir Alexander Madden, CG.KCB.CBE. C in C Plymouth. Our ceremonial guard was one officer, one petty officer and sixteen ratings fallen in by the gangway. The Captain, 1st Lt and I stood opposite the gangway and the piping party of the coxswain and six others stood aft, athwart ships. The Admiral was accompanied by his Flag Lt. The guards “present arms” was very well synchronised.

Joint exercises

We sailed for Portland at 1330 and next day we did A.T.H work. I stood in for the captain and most of our trial attacks on the submarine indicated that we had hit her with at least one bomb. Three French officers came aboard for the next exercise. One of their ships, AGILE, had only commissioned the week before. She had been built with the help of American Aid. During the next few days we carried out several joint anti submarine exercises with the 3 French ships.

Tuesday. The main valve spindle screw controlling the steam to the forced draught fan for No 1 boiler fractured at 03.30 as we were about to get under weigh. The metal was only brass and is constantly

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being adjusted so that, since it probably has not been changed since 1943, it has done very well to last so long. It was repaired quickly at Portland and next day we sailed for Sandown Bay in the Isle of Wight for a large NATO convoy exercise. During the exercise, all the ships did independent weaves and I found the station keeping part very.

Mon 11th Oct. We sailed for Londonderry. On the first exercise we were unlucky with the Asdic and, during the last L.J.X.9 antisubmarine exercise, ~~we~~ were technically sunk by HM Submarine Alaric.

Fri 14th Oct. A special exercise to test a new "aerial torpedo". It was dropped from a Gannet aircraft. On impact with the water, the steadying parachute fell off. After about 7 minutes, the torpedo surfaced and I was in charge of the whaler that was lowered, to recover it. We had great difficulty in hooking it but eventually towed it alongside the quarterdeck and it was hoisted in board.

Sat 15th. I was the officer in charge of the lower deck rounds. These rounds were a daily check that every thing was "ship shape and Bristol fashion." Messes were cleaned and tidied up; spaces safe and uncluttered; toilets, washrooms and galleys were given extra scrutiny. All the men would stand to attention during the round so it was a good test of discipline and personal hygiene. There had been a vast improvement. Previously I had had some difficulty with the leading seaman doing the rounds with me because I was RNVR and young and inexperienced. He and the crew gained some respect for me when I insisted on doing a very thorough round of the whole ship.

Milford Haven

Tues 18th Oct. 1955. We sailed for Milford Haven where we were to represent the Navy on the 150th Anniversary of the Battle of Trafalgar. Milford Haven had special links with Admiral Lord Nelson and Lady Hamilton and the Town Council had originally asked for *the battleship* HMS Vanguard to be sent to mark the occasion. However she was not commissioned and in fact was broken up shortly afterwards. We were sent instead.

Thurs 20th Oct. At 1604 I was coxswain of the motorboat, and, having waited for two RAF Sunderland Flying Boats to splash down we helped secure HMS Carisbrooke Castle to No 10 buoy.

At 1830 next morning, under the guidance of the pilot, we surged forward to the entrance of Milford Dock and with the help of two tugs, secured alongside the herring pier. A guard of honour of sailors from the ship were marched up to St Catherine's Church, Milford where some 200-service personnel were gathered for a thanksgiving Service. Afterwards, there was a supper at the Town Hall.

Sat 28th Oct. I received an appointment to L.C.T.4037 to join at Portsmouth. "Unfortunately, no one seems to know much about it so I shall have to wait in suspense until I see her." [LCT stands for Landing Craft Tank.]

On the Sunday, I joined a small party being shown around Pembrokeshire by Councillor Gough. The tiny City of St David's with its magnificent cathedral were particularly memorable. St David's Cathedral is hidden away at the tip of the Pembroke peninsular and when it comes into view round the last corner there is a real "wow" factor. The building is not as tall as say York Minster, but it seems more atmospheric with the ruined monastic buildings near by.

Our last social event was a film show at HMS Harrier. I met two old chums who were enjoying a 10-week little "d" Course and we hardly noticed the film.

Mon 24th Oct. We glided out of the dock at 0930 and on our way up to N Ireland witnessed the firing of rockets, our 4-inch gun and the Oerlikons. The burst of sound was not nearly as great as I had anticipated. More anti submarine exercises and night flying safety boat duties for the rest of the week, some curtailed by gale force winds.

I left HMS Carisbrooke Castle on the Saturday after a superb farewell lunch on board. "It has been a great experience and one I certainly did not expect when I joined the Navy last year. One leaves her with regrets, but eager to see what the future has in store."

LCT 4037

Sun 30th Oct. After a hectic journey down from Derry via the Belfast Liverpool Boat; the boat train to London and the express to Portsmouth, I arrived at No 15 Dock in Portsmouth Dockyard to find

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HM LCT 4037 wedged in the bottom between an ammunition barge and a paddle wheeled tug, the Sprite. The officer complement was a Lt Cdr as captain, a Sub Lt as 1st Lt and an RNVR Midshipman [me]. I shared a six berth cabin with the Sub Lt. It was built to accommodate the army officers needed at a time of war. We had to live out of suitcases and were allotted compensation from the Admiralty nicknamed "hard liers." All the cabins and the wardroom flat were in a disgraceful mess as they were strengthening the bulkheads.

LCT 4037, was the only LCT commissioned in the Navy at the time, later given the name HMS Rampart but of course nicknamed HMS Rampant by the rest of the fleet.] An LCT is shaped like the bottom of a shoebox with the front end hinged so that it can be lowered to form a ramp to allow vehicles to drive on and off the ship. The rear or after end of the vessel is built up to take the engine room; crews accommodation; the bridge and navigation equipment and the radar and wireless units, aerials etc. She had had a number of experimental features added: - A lattice mast instead of the pole, so that we could have a 974 Radar Unit; An extended ramp in the bow to enable tanks and waterproofed army lorries to swim ashore in a force 5 sea; A built up bridge in the stern so as to be able to see over the forecastle; heavier winches and an anchor cable instead of a wire.

I was given quite a number of the First Lt's jobs – Mate of the upper deck; canteen; wines and minerals; Naval Store keeping; and general dogs body. As mate of the upper deck, I had far more responsibility than before - making sure that everything on deck was in working order and correctly stowed; that the crew were able and willing to follow instructions especially when entering or leaving harbour. My particular role was to operate the hydraulics of the outer bow doors and the long ramp. At sea I took my turn as watch keeping officer.

The refit was originally scheduled to end Nov 20th but the date was advanced to Dec 14th. Captain "D" Portsmouth came on board when we came out of dock, he was happy to tell us that we would stay for at least six months. "So it looks as if all hopes of going abroad are not to be fulfilled."

During the first fortnight I managed to get home: went to several cinemas and theatres, a Scottish dancing club and a badminton club, "so the social side, though costly, seems plentiful."

At that time the Lord Chamberlain's rules about nudity on stage were very strict but it was possible to stage set tableaux of naked girls providing they did not move. A party of Midshipmen took a box close to the stage one night and launched a live mouse on a small parachute onto the stage during a performance. It had the desired effect and the girls ran off screaming.

My Midshipmen's Journal ends at this point. I stayed aboard HMS Rampart until the end of my National Service in September 1956. In the early months, we exercised with the Regular Army and the Territorial Army in particular the Glasgow *Territorial Army* Beach Recovery Unit. On two of the exercises, we ferried them down to Instow beach in North Devon to practice landing and manoeuvring on the wide expanses of flat firm sand. There was a similar exercise on the island of Arran in Scotland. We also took part in a large scale Joint Operations amphibious attack onto the beach at Southsea in co-operation with the Royal Marines in company with the army LCT and numerous small personnel carrying landing craft. A mini version of "D" Day.

Critical moments

There were a number of critical moments such as the time when we were testing out the new extra long ramp while facing into a force 5 sea. We had opened the bow doors and were just beginning to lower the ramp, when the pins securing the hydraulic arms to the bow doors fractured. As forecastle officer, I had to countermand the dockyard experts instruction to go on lowering the ramp. Once the ramp was secured again we had to attach wires to each of the bow doors and pull them shut using the bow and stern winches. It proved a difficult and dangerous task due to the rough sea and strong wind and as far as I know that ramp test was never tried again.

Another occasion was when coming up to buoy in the Gare Loch, Scotland. We did not have a ship's boat, so had to rely on coming alongside the buoy and lowering a man onto it, then passing the bow ropes down to be secured to the ring on the buoy. We kept being blown off the buoy and in the absence of volunteers, and on the principal that an officer should never ask someone to do a task that he is not prepared to do himself. I was lowered down. At the second attempt, the wire was secured and I was pulled back on board. Health and Safety would have been shocked.

At that time the old battleship HMS George V was anchored near by waiting her turn to be broken up.

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The dangers of navigation by dead reckoning before today's sophisticated satellite aids were brought home to me during a long foggy passage up from Lands End to Scotland. The radar monitor warned that there seemed to be bad weather dead ahead, but the picture was very patchy. It was only when we first heard and then saw a large red bell buoy on our port bow that we realised that the patchy highlights on the Radar were the hills of Northern Ireland south of Belfast. Had we not taken immediate avoiding action, we would have ended up on the rocks.

Dordrecht

We had one delightful "Showing the Flag" visit to Dordrecht in Holland and were given outstanding hospitality.

We had a Royal Navy Reserve officer, Ben Foster for a few weeks. He was an officer with the New Zealand Shipping Company and brought his motorbike. He was a delightful companion. I recall one hair-raising cycle ride up to the Gremlin Club in London for a party when we were back in Portsmouth.

Preparing for Suez

In my last few weeks we helped to train the officers who would be in command of the large number of LCTs that were being taken out of mothballs and re-commissioned in order to take part in the Suez War. They had been laid up in reserve in a variety of creeks near Falmouth.

My National Service ended in September 1956 so I missed sailing out to the Suez war in the Mediterranean with the newly commissioned fleet of LCTs.

Conclusion

It is hard to realise quite what a threat the Soviet Union, with Bulganin and Krushchev as its leaders, was seen to be. They made an official visit to the United Kingdom in 1955 and I took photographs from HMS Rampart as we passed the ORJONIKITSE and her two escorting destroyers when they were alongside the harbour in Portsmouth. That was the time when Cdr Crabbe mysteriously disappeared.

Those two years in the Navy were a very valuable character building opportunity. Looking back over the fifty years that have passed since, I realise that as junior Naval officers, we had a most challenging introduction to the real world. It was before we had a viable nuclear deterrent and there seemed a real possibility of having to fight another conventional war. We were all, Regular and National Service personnel, working together to "be prepared" for the worst. I quite expected to have to be called up again before the end of my six years Medical School training.

The "Regulars" in the Navy co-operated well with the National Service men and there was a good team spirit in all the ships I served in. As a National Service Midshipman [Acting Sub Lieutenant in the last few months] I had a very privileged time with a lot of responsibility and fun and little of the boring deskwork that more senior officers had to endure when posted to shore establishments.

"Make the most of your opportunities" I had been advised by Sir James Robb, the Guest of Honour at one sports day at Prep School. We all had to do National Service, so I resolved to enjoy the experience if I could. Those who went in with the attitude that it was a complete waste of time often had their opinions confirmed. They were demoralised, disillusioned and counted the days up to the end of their compulsory National Service. I benefited enormously and changed from a naive immature youth into "a man of the world". It has been an enormous advantage in my subsequent career

Looking back.

Looking back, the role of the Royal Navy has changed beyond recognition. The surface fleet, being so vulnerable to Exocet missiles and the like, has been reduced to few dozen. Our whole strategy seems

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to rely on nuclear submarine deterrence and the development of aircraft carriers with fixed wing Harrier and helicopter squadrons on board.

This account provides "a snap shot in the time" between 1954 and 56 and I do not suppose that there are many such records that have been published.

Dr Michael G F Crowe, MB. BChir. FRCGP; Fellow of the BMA; Ex Sub Lt RNVR.

14th October 2007