

Swinging the Lamp

A few submariners “dits” about my time as a submariner.

Background – A tiff (Artificer)(ERA) could not go into the Submarine Service until he had gained his Unit Certificate and rated CPO & ERA 1. All submariners, both Officers and ratings, were at that time (1963) volunteers.

Joined HMS Dolphin for Submarine Training early in August 1963. On completion of joining routine, reported to Lt Chapman (SD Eng) in the workshops. By 1100 was on HMS Odin in watches doing a camshaft drive repair. The next day Odin sailed with the repair team still on board, dived south of 10W for exercises, two days later returned to Dolphin. No formal training, no tank, no submarine pay.

Started ERA’s course, filled in drafting preference card asking for SM 4 Australia. Course instructor CERA Rusty Burnet, Regulating CERA Bob Amos, both of whom castigated me for being too cheeky in asking for SM 4 when there was a queue a mile long of experienced submariners trying to get there. Completed course as top student. At that time the top two students were earmarked “Nuclear”, however my draft chit had arrived and I was going to HMS Tabard, Australia.

In the time from completing courses and flying to Aus I came to work every day by car, parked up, got into a pussars car, went up to Fort Southwick , had a secure briefcase chained to my person and spent the day extracting from the system drawings of a new S/M being built, the details to make up Wall Drop drawing for teaching. The drawing office in HMS Vernon turned my sketches into the necessary professional wall drop. The S/M was HMS Resolution, first SSBN and all the drawings were very highly classified.

Transit to Aus. Arrived at Northolt with family and met others destined for Aus including my CERA. Spotted a young man (plain clothes) in some distress, approached him to ascertain his problem and found out that nobody had told him his draft was married accompanied. His wife arrived in Aus 3 months later. The RPO who did his drafting procedure ended up as a Leading Reg. The young lad was one of our stokers and was forever loyal.

Arrived Aus 3rd day, up early into uniform to try to get from Manly to Garden Island DKYD to join Tabard. Knock at door, there stood the Squadron Engineer (Lt Cdr Ted Edwards) to take me to work and to tell my wife that I was once again in shifts and therefore did not know when I would return (or how). Completed job and went to the “Rockers” for a few beers with the rest of the Tiffs (all in uniform). Bought a raffle ticket and won! She was beautiful; however I had to explain that I was going home to my wife. Put the ticket on the bar and backed off from the crowd trying to grab it.

3 Sailed for NZ and lost our dome in very rough weather. Unfit to dive, sauntered around the North Island of NZ. Our UC Richards got a letter from his Mrs saying that a very large crate had been delivered to their house addressed to him. Putting 2 & 2 together he informed the CO, signals sent and new dome recovered from his front garden.

Tabard went into refit in Vickers (Cockatoo Island) and as I was the baby tiff was transferred to Taciturn, just out of refit. Became Outside Wrecker which in those days included Torpedo Tubes as the OA's were inboard

A good S/M besides working with the RAN and RNZN, again in NZ. Also did Fiji, Newcastle (NSW), Brisbane, Townsville, Cairns, Lae, Madang, Rabaul. We put into Townsville on my 27th birthday. By the time everything was cleared away it was tot time and although I was not a regular tot drinker decided to enjoy the ambience and had my tot and sippers. During this the 4th Hand knocked on our door and asked me to accompany him to the Wardroom where the CO wanted to see me. I entered the Wardroom and the CO said what would you like to drink? I thought that although I got on well with the Officers and was, as outside wrecker in their presence quite a lot, it was unusual for a CPO to be invited into the Wardroom for a birthday nip.

However they all raised their glasses and Co said; Congratulations Sub Lieutenant Mounstephen. In the mail was the latest batch of AFO's which included the SD promotion list. In those days no signals etc.

Australia was a good draft, a great time and I even contemplated leaving the RN and staying in Aus.

Snippets; "Butch" Tasker our "donkshop horse" left Taciturn and the RN and was commissioned into the RA Army as a Captain.

Lt Chapman (SD Eng) – (Workshops Dolphin) also appeared in Aus as a Lt Col in RA Army

Tabard : 1stLt Chris Wood - Rear Admiral

Taciturn : 1stLt Peter Johnson-Hall - RAN Captain

Mike Bracelin - RN Captain

John Bent WEO - Rear Admiral

Toby Frere - Rear Admiral (FOSM)

Hugo White - Admiral (CINC Fleet), (Sir Hugo)

SD Courses Greenwich
Manadon

HMS Maidstone a Ships Deputy Marine Engineer Officer.

I had a huge division of 127, including the Junior Stokers. Also most Stokers from DQ's joined Maidstone. Division varied from CERA's, ERA's, Chief Stokers and so on. Also the bulk of the ship diving team were from my department under the control of another Lt Chapman who later gained notoriety by getting stuck on the bottom in the Vickers mini sub.

Was Duty Officer to slip Israeli S/M Dakar (lost in Med). She sailed with a full war load of fish.

Was Duty Officer when Warspite lost her "egg beater" and it was my divers who put the bung in the hole.

As an SD Officer (Submarines) was co-opted to sit on the advancement board of tiffs in nuclear submarines. I therefore had to crawl around these boats learning their systems in order to be able to sensibly act as a board member.

As I said I had all the Junior Stokers in my huge division. Had a hole cut in my office bulkhead with a small door so that I could converse with MAA who was next door.

Little things like Junior's charged for being adrift because the last bus from Helensburgh got to the jetty at Faslane 5mins after their leave expired. Changed their leave times to suit arrival of last bus. An "O" class boat came in having just been on a harrowing "sneaky"; RPO on well picking them up for haircuts, nearly lynched. The MAA told his people the facts of life no more RPO's present when boats returned from arduous patrols.

S/M Courses for Engineers. Nothing untoward other than to say that in those days in addition to the engineering side, engineers were given quite deep training in seamanship including carrying out attacks by the Attack Teacher Course Officer – Toby Frere.

Again being a stropky bugger asked for an "O"boat based Singapore - there was only one and I got it - Onslaught.

Whilst awaiting transit I got a pier head jump to Artful. No further comment.

Joined Onslaught in Singapore. My first impression was of total disgust, not with the S/M, but with the way a RN Officer was treated in general. The Army and RAF had a host of people meeting soldiers, airmen, NCO's and Officers and they were all whisked off in cars, landrovers and such like. My family and I stood alone until an Indian driver came and said my name whereby I had to load my family and luggage into an RN bus to be taken to the rest centre in Johore Bahru.

Onslaught - a great boat with a great CO.

Was Far East sneaky boat, no RADAR, but stacks of ECM. The Engineer I relieved, Ken Colman, crossed the bar recently as did our CREL; "Dusty" Miller.

Went back to Aus with the Depot Ship, HMS Forth in attendance. Cocktail Party introduced to some ex Submariners, one of whom clicked his heels and bowed. It transpired he was ex German U Boat but because there was no ex German Submariners Association had joined UK/Aus Association.

Other event of note : In a joint US/UK/Aus exercise we had "sunk" both carriers and surfaced to transfer one of ours to HMAS Melbourne because the guy had gone

“yellow” (perhaps jaundice). Just before I arrived in Aus for Tabard, Melbourne had cut in half HMAS Voyager. A few days later she did the same to USS Frank E Evans. Our lad on Melbourne returned by chopper, fit and well, with CO Melbourne’s commendation because with no part of ship and now fit, he was part of the first aid parties dealing with badly injured guys from the Evans.

Other dits. As I said earlier my S/M training included quite in depth training as a seaman. I was also Action OOW. My CO made me a 1st OOW with a seaman back up and as such saved the old man’s bacon a couple of times.

- transmitting from Celebes area to S’pore (no RADAR) very poor fixes because sun not clear so were using a Heron DF set (yacht nav). Noticed a very large Manta Ray come out of the water, had a closer look and saw seagulls standing up from RED 90 to Green) 90, full astern! Captain on Bridge, in time for wash to mid ships full of sand. We had gone up the middle of a large horse shoe shaped Ramora Shoals. About another 400m and we would have been left high and dry

My lookout was always Ldg Seaman Oldfield. We always got on well together. One day we had a US Rear Admiral with us operating quite close to an area in SE Asia where we must not admit to being. I said to LS Oldfield, Red10 what do you think that is. He had a long look and said – it looks like a battleship crows nest. The Admiral agreed. Down the voicepipe – Tell the Captain - I could hear them , the bloody Engineer is on watch again. Sure enough it was the USS St Paul/Minneapolis. She trained all her turrets on us with the Captain telling me to challenge her. Alpha, Alpha, Alpha oh shit!

Another occasion we had landed some SAS guys (they were not ours). As Action OOW my job was to count them all out (Elephants trunk) and count them all in. We had come up on 4MBT only and were awash. Last one in, 1short I shouted, permission to blow 4MBT. Meanwhile the Captain is having a meaningful discussion (short) with OOW, so repeated my plea 2 more times before getting the OK. The Officer left out had finger nailed himself to the top of fin (fin door shut) and was about to let go when the process reversed itself. A lucky man, a grateful man.

Again operating in the same areas we kept being put down (snorting) by strong X band rackets. Our batteries were getting quite low. Therefore next time instead of stop snorting (remember I am 1st OOW) I went full elevation and could then see a whole pile of B52’s transmitting back to Guam. Got CO’s permission to continue snorting.

However on one occasion on taking over the watch snorting having had a good look round, passed over scope and went to chart table and within a minute shouted Stop Snorting – Captain Control Room – we were snorting in 10 fathoms of water!

There are many other dits too many to tell.

However left S’pore for transit to UK via India, Iran, Bahrain, Mombasa, Simonstown, St Helena, Ascension and Gib. Had a meeting with ops staff, (My CO included all his Officers in operational discussions) and managed to get our SOA reduced by 1 knot. This enabled us to run on the surface on just one engine enabling the Tiffs to maintain the other engine. The only defect we had in the whole journey was a water jacket leak, fixed by ourselves in Mombasa.

On the way back to UK stopped at Karachi – in those days not a bad run ashore for the Officers – well looked after. Amongst our reprovisioning we took on fresh water (forward only). A few days out and people were going down everywhere – except me, my Tiffs and the stokers. Went into Bandarapas (Iran) then onto Bahrain. An USS Destroyer sent over their doctor – no diagnosis. On arrival in Bahrain an Army Doctor came on board – again no diagnosis. By this time the CO had decreed that temperatures under 103 worked, over 103 into pits. Incidentally I was on the bridge for 48 hours non stop. My eyes were like the proverbial piss holes in the snow. First night in Bahrain moved ashore to HMS Sheba and at the Wardroom Bar discussed, as you do, our problem. There was an RN doctor there (John Osborn) who asked the CO to accompany him to his cabin. Ten minutes later there are blue flashing lights as the CO is whisked off to hospital with a collapsed lung. All Officers were given quick checks and two more; the 1st Lt and the Supply Officer were off to hospital. The next day the whole crew were on sick call and it resulted in five ratings and two Officers casevaked to UK and reliefs sent out. A doctor sailed with us to Mombasa by which time our problem seemed solved.

Sixteen years later I was in HMS Rooke Wardroom in transit when I got into discussion with two Doctors at the bar. When they found out that I was on Onslaught during the medical problem they informed me that it was the first recorded incident of what later became known as Legionnaires Disease. Thank God we were a bunch of reasonably fit young men.

A good run in Mombasa, Simonstown, St Helena where I dined with the Consul and the French Ambassador (Napoleon's resting place before transfer to France), Ascension OK: However Gibraltar became a bit of a nightmare.

Got in about 0800, Wardroom invited for lunchtime drinks by Flag Officer. I was duty. The FO talking to my CO and looking down on the basin observed a submarine doing a trot fob. He looked around at the gathering and said to the CO – Who is driving your boat? The CO, without a twitch, said it is the Engineer. No more was said - however (a bit of background) – a sailor joined us in S'pore with the name of Jack Tarr. I knew he was a little unusual because he missed the liberty boat from HMS Forth, stripped to his under wear, bundled it up onto his head and swam ashore. Had we known then!!

Anyway rounds were complete, the fore ends were showing a movie and I had been invited. About half way through the movie a young sailor sidled up to me and said can I speak to you privately – yes I said and left the fore end. The young sailor had been sitting on the casing for'd of the dome fishing when all of a sudden there was the rat, tat, tat of Sterling submachine gun being fired across the basin. I told the young sailor to get the duty PO who happened to be CPO "L" Mech. Ten minutes later there was a tugging at the Wardroom door curtain followed by a blotchy red faced man on his knees asking if I wanted to see him. He had found the Chief's Mess rum bottle and consumed most of it. Oh dear. Sent for the outside wrecker, a large man, together with the duty killick. Instructed the wrecker to go up the tower and see if the sten gun was in its proper place in the fin and bring it down below. Thankfully it was in its stowage and was brought below with 8 rounds discharged. What to do? First RN Provost for both problems to their custody, at least overnight. CO ashore with his wife staying in the Rock Hotel. Again a problem – if any other ship had noticed high velocity pieces of metal flying past or hitting their ships they would have reported it,

wouldn't they? Decided to write a short note to CO telling him of problem, but that his presence was not required as both persons were in custody. Passed note to patrol for them to find the CO and outline problem. Spent most of night trying to figure out what Jack Tarr's charges should be, the duty PO was easy – he lost his rate. Tarr was returned to UK and got there before we did but not before he had spent several hours on the Captain's phone talking to his Mum about us nasty people on the submarine - the CO got a magnificent telephone bill on arrival in UK. How Tarr got into the CO's cabin no one seems to know but thankfully it was not on my watch.

Went into refit at Devonport

Sent on Nuclear Course at Greenwich

Transferred from SD list to General list, first ME to do so. Green Rub, on transfer my pay marked time (SD Lts got more than 8yrs GL Lts) until I became Lt Cdr.

Joined Warspite in refit in Chatham. Bloody hard work. I worked it out that most of the Engineers and Tiffs were putting 120hrs a week during the last 3 months of refit. Did work up etc. On completion were exercising in N Atlantic off 100 fathom line when on UW telephone was heard – Warspite, Warspite this is Dreadnought you are SUBSUNK. We came up quickly. But this was not before the BBC had told the world including our families that we were SUBSUNK: Some bright Sparky had put our Check signal in the wrong pigeonhole at Faslane hence the subsequent panic.

WARSPITE - to Staff Course No real comment other than to say why was it that two Nuclear Engineer Submariners left different boats, had two weeks leave before course, whilst some Seamen had had 6 months preparatory leave and study? Passed it anyway

RESOLUTION(Starb'd) Joined at Faslane sailed to Devonport. Thence to refit in Rosyth.

On completion of refit, work up, DASO (missile firing) in Cape Canaveral. Two patrols, the second one was the 100th Polaris patrol and the longest, not by design but because the Civil Servants were on strike and the relieving boat could not be loaded with the full complement of missiles.

Left Resolution after 3yrs 8mths, went to Rosyth DKYD as DKYD Officer to refit HMS Revenge.

Promoted to Commander.

Appointed to HMS Caledonia as Training Commander. Full circle, did my Tiffs training there and now I was in charge of Tiffs training until closure in 1986.

Had got all the paperwork, except my appointment to go to MONS (NATO) BELGIUM: Phone call from Appointer to say that Maggie Thatcher had decided to privatise the DKYD's and as I had a lot of Nuc Refit and Dockyard experience I was not going to Belgium I was going to Bath to oversee the Submarine side of DGSR (Director General Ship Refitting). I deliberately spelt it out because the powers that be said we were to have nothing to do with repair. That was to be the domain of CINC Nav Home through Fleet Maintenance etc. What a load of crap.

In the end CINC Nav Home was knocking on our door for money and people to be able function at all levels, especially after the HMS Southampton collision in the Gulf whereby the repair manpower from DGSR was greater than my DGSR staff refitting a Polaris Submarine. - Petty Politics.

Anyway spent over two years based in Bath travelling up and down the country sorting out contracts, specifications and such like. Must have travelled many thousands of miles in Hire Cars, slept in many beds (alone) in many hotels. Had a complete new wardrobe, not by design, but because I would go to work on Monday expecting to be home at a sensible time only to find myself in London, then Derby, the Liverpool and so on. Marks and Spencer did well out of me in socks, pants, shirts etc.

As DGSR developed it became clear that major projects needed a man on the spot so I moved from Bath back to Rosyth as Project Manager Nuclear - finished Valiant and Repulse at Rosyth, took in hand Churchill, Renown. Eventually separate projects that had separate Project Managers. I kept Renown. Had virtually completed Renown and was about to do Power Range Testing (Critical Operations) when informed that there was a problem on Warspite in Devonport. The upshot was called the "Trouser Leg" problem. Fortunately Churchill was in the next dock to Renown and she became the guinea pig for the research into a repair technique. The repair, research, implementation and testing added a year to Renown's refit. Unfortunately Warspite, Churchill, Conqueror and Courageous were withdrawn from Service.

I stayed with Renown throughout sea Trials, including her first dive. Running in parallel with this period and for about a year we were planning the refit of Revenge. Again a change of plan and instead of refit she was to be de-equipped and laid up. One of the peculiar things about DGSR was that in bidding for money for our refit (Parliamentary Finance Votes) we had to consider the VAT element and where it should be applied. Obviously in refitting a ship or submarine you improve it and therefore add value. However as Revenge was to be de-equipped and laid up my mind said no added value therefore no VAT. The VAT men in Kirkcaldy agreed with me but it had to go all the way up – eventually causing a specific question in the House of Commons. The answer was I had to pay VAT! No problem. I increased my Vote Bid, got the money from Parliament and then paid them back via the VAT man. Crazy really but I suspect it kept people happy and in jobs.

Left the Royal Navy on 23rd July 1993 after 38 years of which 30 years were in submarines. HM the Queen thanked me personally with an OBE.

There are many, many dits and other interesting stories that could fill a book.