

“NAVAL AIR”
Or Tales from the Lower Deck.

By Joe Carver

PROLOGUE.

My father joined the R.C.N. in 1915 as a boy seaman. His first ship was H.M.C.S. Rainbow. Dad retired in November 1945. I joined in February '46 & my brother during the summer of 1952. The RCN has been important to our family & many an angry criticism or questions regarding the political decisions affecting the navy which we loved have passed between us!

My brother says I'm too intense & should just ignore the political impacts which impinged upon our careers because he maintains, there is nothing that can be done. He sometimes argues that we as individuals are too insignificant & our opinions count for nothing.

I find ignoring our politicians & their actions completely unsatisfactory.

I feel someone should be held accountable for the decisions & actions of Messer's Pearson; Hellyer & Trudeau & what they have done to our naval military service.

However, what can one do? Why did our leading officers not come to the defence of our naval aviation branch?

There is an old adage that history forgotten will be repeated.

Mr Paul Hellyer conceived a plan whereby all aviation related actions would be carried out by the air force. He also thought that there could be a single military unit capable of performing all military related functions.

What made this person ignore the historic thinking on the same subjects & developments of both the USA & the UK?

Both these nation's departments of Defence had long ago proved that a single air force could not successfully carry out both land & maritime warfare. There had to be a naval aviation element familiar in the thinking & actions of sea warfare.

This thinking is so very apparent that the US navy decreed many years ago that all Captains of US carriers must be qualified pilots. Also before the beginning of WW 2 the RN created the FAA to be responsible for all naval aviation at sea. This RN action was after a 15 year experiment of having a Royal Air Force responsible for all Air defence with no specific naval aviation branch per se'.

With these historic thoughts & developments what logic &/or thinking could have possessed Mr. Hellyer? Did he think he was more clever or more intelligent than the British admiralty and the decision makers of the USA armed forces?

But the even greater action & slap in the face from Messers Pearson, Trudeau and Hellyer was the expunging of the naval aviation branch of the RCN.

During 2010 two notable events of Canadian history will occur & be celebrated. In February, Vancouver will host the 2010 Olympic Winter Games. The second will be the various celebrations which will occur in different Canadian locations throughout the year. These multi faceted celebrations will all be commemorating the 100th Anniversary of the Royal Canadian Navy.

Both are significant events. Histories or commentaries will be written about the accomplishments of the Olympic athletes. Also, during this naval Centennial year, we could find new or updated naval histories written, or revised, regarding the notable individuals who impacted or influenced the development of our 100 year old naval service.

These histories will record people & events that will be noted, lauded, praised & described.

Virtually every history, documenting, explaining & extolling our Navy has been written by a serving officer, a retired officer or a politician. Therefore, all the naval narratives concern & explain our officers; the events surrounding our officers; or the involved politician rationalizing his actions. That is because recorders record from a point with which they are most familiar.

A great deal has been written of naval life & the living conditions within the lower deck. However, the number of publications written from a seaman's point of view of that life is extremely few. Any written commentary has usually been viewed as containing a lower deck bias & therefore "really not what it actually was" or we didn't appreciate the larger picture.

Therefore if one may judge by past documentations of history &/or events any records or writings will be of & by our past or present serving officers.

This is understandable when one considers that it has been the officers & politicians who over the years -- correctly or incorrectly {depending on your point of view} -- made decisions which directly influenced & effected naval development.

It is probably safe to say that in these new histories there will be no extensive recognition of the personnel in the lower deck -- The Chiefs; the Petty Officers; the Leading seamen & below.

Usually if and when some one from the Lower Deck writes or expounds some criticism it gets "tagged" as a rant or a comment from the un-enlightened. An Officer's anger is to remain subdued, controlled and unspoken! **In my opinion they (Officers) are taught that to openly query events is disloyal. Their futures depend on their adherence acceptance and implementation of policies to which they personally disagree.**

True most of the Lower Deck personnel have neither the educational opportunities nor the social backgrounds of our leaders. Consequently when a "Lower Deck" opinion is expounded it is usually ignored or defeated by a person speaking to & from a different social level. A very old adage is that "Kings speak to Kings".

It was however, the lower deck personnel who performed & adapted to all the idiosyncratic -- sometimes radical & sometimes absolutely stupid -- ideas of those supposedly noteworthy officers &/or politicians. Many of their 'ideas' or concepts first appeared to have small effect at their outset. Later however, their full impact was felt.

In 1945 during the transition from a war time to a peace time naval environment 'they' removed our identifying Canada badges from the shoulders of our jumpers. 'They' also removed the Maple Leaf crest from off the funnels of our ships & we returned to the disciple practices & attitudes of Canada's pre-war British style navy.

When H.M.C.S. Magnificent was commissioned in Belfast {1948} the newly appointed Commander had previously been the Executive Officer of H.M.C.S. Stadacona. The navy's training establishment complete with Gunnery Schools; Signal Schools; Engineering School facilities on the East Coast & as such had barracks type of disciple. The Commander brought this Pusser's attitude to a man of war. He would walk around "Nelson-like" carrying his telescope under his arm. We could not speak to our NCOs without prefacing our comments with Petty Officer or Chief Petty Officer or Leading Seaman; instead of the more familiar "Chief" or "PO".

The first real indication of discontent occurred one night in the Irish Sea when the Commander had inadvertently left his telescope on the Bridge when he secured. The Commander's telescope -- an item awarded & presented to him when he had graduated from the R.N. Naval College -- was thrown over the side. Leave was stopped for the entire Ship's Company until the culprit admitted his sin.

By 1949 these apparently simple decisions made during 1945-46 resulted in 3 documented & recorded mutinies in Canadian ships. Mutiny was considered too strong a description & they were reported & referred to as "Incidents". {see Mainguy report}.

Even during the Royal Commission investigations & reviews of discontent the Lower Deck witnesses were lied to. We had been told that no recording of evidence, observations, or opinions expressed during interviews would be kept. We were assured that any names or conversations were not to be recorded.

This proved false because while the military representatives of the Royal Commission kept their word the appointed political representative kept a written record of all proceedings, which later became public domain because he placed his record of events in the National Library of Canada.

Canadian naval air survived the 1948 “Kniffen Plan” which without consultation or consideration of its impact completely changed our trade designations & our rank structures. The Kniffen plan introduced Chief Petty Officers & Petty Officers of first & second classes. With the turmoil associated with the cessation of hostilities many ratings had not received promotions due them or had not had the examinations for promotion made available.

The Kniffen Plan however, decreed that “any person passed for leading seaman prior to June 1st 1948 was to be promoted to the new classification of Petty Officer 2nd Class. These promotions were automatic and effective on February 15th 1949”. This new classification with its date of implementation totally disregarded people who were senior to some being promoted but had not had the opportunity to qualify by the dates proscribed thus creating immeasurable discontent & animosity.

We struggled through the Diefenbaker / Pearkes Conservative years with their economies & unnecessary attempts of standardization.

However, no armed force regardless of morale & esprit de corps could survive the decisions; the impact & the effects of the Liberal era of Pearson/Hellyer followed by Trudeau’s years of disregard. Mr. Hellyer could not have fully thought out the ramifications of the integration & unification of our armed services plus the method of incorporation. The changes during the 1964-66 periods completely re-wrote traditional military structure & concept.

Confusion existed between officers & men regarding implementation methods & their impact upon the functions throughout barracks or ships.

Negative opinions of these political plans or actions could not be publicly expressed. Any recommendation contrary to the political action was viewed as negative opposition. Senior people were passed over for promotion & the only rebuttal to implementation was by resignation. By 1966 the Canadian Navy through either dismissals or resignations had lost 4 admirals. The Canadian army suffered the loss of several Generals for the same cause.

Still no one saw or completely appreciated the threat of Mr. Hellyer’s single minded actions. Prime Minister Pearson is reputed to have remarked that if he heard of one more resignation or complaint due to the integration program he would cancel the whole concept.

Adm. Landymore was the last & no one else was forthcoming.

From a then held Lower Deck point of, and still strongly held by some, we were let down by our Officers! Lower Deck people are trained not to question but to follow our leaders – our Officers. To question or rebel was considered disloyal or mutinous. Why didn’t our Officer corps – as a unit—stand up and be counted in support of Landymore?

One could mention & query the rationale behind the inactions of Oxholm; Falls & others. Perhaps there were too many thoughts of self-aggrandizement.

One of the greatest blows to our Navy was the 1966 decision to abolish & expunge the Canadian Naval Aviation branch.

When one considers that Hellyer served briefly as a Corporal in the R.C.A.F. it becomes clearer how his thinking could be so narrow.

As integration & unification proceeded it became apparent that some naval air pilots, who were ex-RCAF, did not attempt to save us. Such acknowledgement came as a shock! How could we expect to survive

when our own leaders would not stand up & be counted? In fact there is one senior naval air officer to whom we should all say “Et tu Brute?”

It was not the original intent of this dissertation to bemoan the fate of my naval aviation branch & the messmates with whom I served. However, it has been suggested that certain persons should have a history lesson regarding the 20 years in question & naval air in general.

Firstly let me explain my background which may also provide a *raison d’etre* for my concerns. My Father, my Brother & I have a total 75 years of background in the RCN.

My father’s 30 years were as a Wireless Telegrapher from 1915 (his first ship was as a Boy Seaman in HMCS Rainbow) through until November 1945. Dad joined as a Stoker but quickly learned that when the entire Ship’s Company turned to for ‘coaling ship’ the wireless telegraphers were excused. Even in 1920 the “Green” empire were considered special!

My 20 years were from February ’46 through September ’66 in the Naval Air Branch & my brother’s 25 were from 1952 through 1977.

He was a West Coast sailor while I as naval air was East Coast.

As children we grew up just outside the Esquimalt Dockyard gates. I sold Liberty & Saturday Evening Post magazines in the mess decks of the HMCS Vancouver; HMCS Skeena; HMCS Armentiers; & HMCS Fraser. I can remember we were excused from school the day HMCS Fraser arrived as a new addition to our navy from England. My father stood watches in the ‘Tower’ in Esquimalt Harbour. One night in 1931 during the Middle Watch a message in plain language came through saying: “The Fleet has mutinied at Invergordon”. Perhaps if our leaders had read a bit they would have found the root or the dissatisfactions causing the Invergordon mutiny were close parallels to our 3 RCN ‘incidents’ during the late 1940’s.

So you see my navy is just not that of Shearwater & our Naval Air it was my life. There was never a thought that I might enter or consider any other vocation or career.

I had been brought up with the philosophy that we were eating off the blue collar. Therefore you did not bite the hand that fed you. You voted Liberal because they were good for the ‘Andrew’. From ’46 to ’66 while in the service I voted Liberal. I left in ’66 & went to University. While there I studied a few Political Science courses. WHAT A REVELATION!

The intent is to relate a few of the humorous incidents which occurred between 1945 & 1966 plus describe the environment of those ‘Other’ more noteworthy heroes; the lower deck personnel of our Canadian Naval Air branch.

We started merely as brain washed young men who, like all 18 year olds, believed they were immortal & unbeatable. The Naval Air Branch, while small was – in our minds – the best.

In 1945 Canada possessed the third largest navy in the world & was destined -- because of our NATO commitments -- to become the epitome of anti – submarine navies in the world.

We have become a toothless ineffective navy with few surface ships; no aircraft carrier or naval air branch; relegated to a search & rescue unit.

PURPOSE

Hopefully the preceding, somewhat argumentative, statements have caught your attention & perhaps stimulated your further interest.

Several years ago, while attending a C.N.A.G. {Canadian Naval Air Group} reunion in Winnipeg, someone suggested the numerous & humorous ‘Salty Dips’, concerning people & past events, which we had known & occurred during our active service years, should be documented.

For those who might be strangers to Canadian or British naval slang the term ‘Salty Dip’ is jargon for the relating or describing of an event or incident which occurred on board a ship; in a barracks or within some other naval environment.

It was agreed that the actions of some of our Messmates; the awkward predicaments of others; along with the absurdities which we had tolerated & at which we had laughed, should not be lost. But, who could or would do the writing? Who amongst us could satisfactorily describe & document those situations which we believed so humorous?

The raison d’etre therefore, in writing these ‘Salty Dips’, is an attempt to fulfill the suggestion of years ago; to capture & describe those incidents or events – real or imagined – which we retell & relive during reunions.

Messmates; I do not profess to be a writer of quality -- I am merely trying to serve as a collector; a collator and a relater, of time & things gone by. I am not attempting to convince anyone of how pleasant it was to serve in the transitional, post war, Canadian Navy or, to make any political statement or criticism. My intent is merely to relate a few of the humorous anecdotes of our Naval Air life. The stirred memories may serve to remind ourselves of how we felt during our Naval Air careers. I believe we are all -- or should be -- mature enough to admit that we enjoyed each other; the laughter, the absurdities & the ‘bullshit’.

Hopefully these ‘Dips’, will bring a smile & stir some pleasant memories. Just for the moment you may recall what Naval Air was like in R.C.N.A.S. Dartmouth when we were 18?

BACKGROUND

As described the term ‘Salty Dip’ is naval jargon for the relating or describing of events or incidents which have occurred in a naval environment—on board a ship or in a barracks. I have heard it argued that ‘Salty Dip’ is incorrect & should be ‘Salty Dit’ -- short for ‘Salty Ditty’. Regardless, any ‘Dip’ or ‘Ditty’ you read or hear always occurred several years ago; -- or maybe not at all because -- as they say -- nothing is lost in translation.

Readers, interested in this discourse, will probably be ‘matelots’ {sailors} or people who are or were service or military oriented. For clarification therefore, the introductory statement into any incident, event, circumstance or situation should inform the recipient, whether they are reading or hearing, a ‘Fairy Tale’ or a ‘Salty Dip’. With even minimal naval knowledge or experience, the difference between the two is immediately discernable. Because, a ‘Fairy Tale’ always begins with, “Once upon a time...”. While, as any matelot knows, a ‘Salty Dip’ invariably starts with, “This is no shit...”

A person relating a ‘Salty Dip’ may -- depending upon their vocabulary & descriptive skills -- embellish or expand the truth of the actual event. Regardless of truth, exaggeration or rumour, there is always something factual, or circumstantially humorous, to the story. Usually a ‘Dip’ is both sardonic and humorous with its irony. Throughout the ‘Dip’ either something or someone is looking silly or the circumstances are just too absurd to be real. It is that silliness & absurdity which makes it humorous.

When there is absolutely no truth in the described event or in its description then it simply becomes a ‘Fairy Tale’, a rumour, or just a ‘Buzz’. You may not believe the ‘Dips’ which follow. There are some however, who will swear to the truth of these occurrences.

I apologize to those whose names have been used without consent or approval. I can not request or get your permission because I do not know where you live -- or if you are alive or dead. One can only assume or hope you would/will not disapprove. You were willing participants & did not object to the situation when it originally occurred so why would you object now?

Certain numbers in the descriptions of the R.C.N.A.S. Dartmouth, {Royal Canadian Naval Air Station} of 1946 are estimates or general in nature. Do not discard or cease reading the remaining ‘Dips’ because you perhaps disagree with any approximations. I assure you the estimated numbers are as near as ‘damn it’ is to swearing.

Your Grand children, if & when they read or hear these ‘Dips’ -- will probably view you with newly discovered knowledge or respect. They will recognize that you were once like them -- a young, vital person. With a smile they may turn to you & say, “Granddad is this true?” “Did you guys really do stuff like that?” Therefore, to those of you- - my messmates -- who made the early years both bearable &

unforgettable, I shall attempt to relate a couple of memories, in which, many of you were involved & most certainly shared.

Over the years our Naval Air 'thing' has changed. As we have aged the membership in C.N.A.G. has dwindled. Attendance at the annual reunions has decreased & regretfully, many remembrances of people & past events are waning.

During our Canadian Navy celebrations praiseworthy historic events will be recalled. But, what of the others that will be overlooked?

The historic events & developments to which I allude have been & gone; & regretfully will probably not be mentioned throughout the celebrations.

One of those events & its development was the 20 year period of Canadian Naval Air. Even though Canada no longer has anything that might claim to be Canadian Naval aviation, if you served in the Royal Canadian Naval Air branch between December 1945 & September 1966, be proud! We were, & will always remain, a vital piece of Canadian Naval history. You lived; you experienced; & you still represent a period of Canadian Naval history which disappeared 43 years ago!

Regretfully 'Naval Air', & the role we played, is one which a very large percentage of the Canadian populace, plus a majority of our present Canadian armed forces personnel, is totally unaware!

Certain portions of this narrative contain 'Naval Jargon'. For those, not familiar with Canadian naval life & for a better comprehension or understanding of that life with its idiosyncratic surroundings, a brief explanation or description of our habits; our expressions & practices; is probably required. Hopefully you will not find these details too boring, verbose, prosaic or confusing. However, the brief digression with a few embellishments is necessary to either describe or explain the situation; the time of the event; plus the class distinctions which loomed large & impacted upon us daily. 'Pussers', for example, means an official action; a "by the book attitude" or a Government issued item. 'Tiddley' refers to appearance both personal & the surrounding environment. One was wearing his 'Tiddley' when dressed in his #1 uniform which was especially tailored; made from good quality serge, with gold badges & medals. When one cleaned up or prepared for inspection the person or place could be referred to as 'looking Tiddley'.

To be 'Drafted' was to be transferred to a different ship; a different squadron or another place of duty. 'Divisions' were our formal parade. Over the years, depending upon the personal preferences of our various Commanders or Captains, 'Divisions' were usually a weekly or sometimes a monthly occurrence. Even the day or time for 'Divisions' – Friday afternoon or Saturday forenoon – depending on the Captain or the Commander's preference -- could vary. However, for 'Divisions', the entire Ship's Company was 'fallen in' on the parade square, inspected & then 'Marched Past' the saluting dais.

The 'Master at Arms' & his 'Regulating Branch' personnel were the police force & prosecuting attorneys of the navy.

To 'Secure' was to finish work or cease what ever one was doing.

A 'Killick' was a Leading Seaman.

To 'Jump Ship' was to improperly leave the ship or barracks.

One was 'Adrift' if he was late for anything.

A 'Black - Listman' was a person undergoing punishment which had been awarded for some misdemeanour.

The twenty-four hour clock was used to describe the time. For example if it was 10 AM one said Ten Hundred or for 10:30 AM one would say One Oh Three Oh. For the same times but, after 12 noon, one described the time as twenty-two hundred or twenty-two thirty. We did not use the term 'hours' after stating the time. The word 'hours' was deemed a redundant & unnecessary term.

There were proper methods or protocols for addressing or approaching a senior person. If one wished to speak with a person senior to themselves, one prefaced any opening statement with the person's rank. Chief Petty Officers were 'Chief'; Petty Officers were 'POs'; & Officers were 'Sir'. The only exceptions to this were if one spoke to the Master at Arms or the Coxswain. While they usually carried & wore the rank or insignia of a Chief Petty Officer, if one had occasion to speak to either, they were addressed as 'Master' or 'Cox'n' respectively. If someone erred & called either of them "Chief", it was not unusual to hear:

"Did I hear you address me as Chief? Good Christ! You'll probably be saying Bollocks to the Commander next."

Regardless that a Gunner's Mate would turn the air blue with his descriptions of you & your actions when handing you a 'blast', it was considered impolite or tactless to use certain four letter Anglo-Saxon expressions in front of, or to, a person of higher rank -- especially if speaking to or while addressing an officer.

In 1946, Canada had 3 navies; – one on the West Coast in Esquimalt, B.C. {referred to as the Yacht Squadron}; a second, on the East Coast, in Halifax, N.S. {referred to as the Fish Head navy} & the third, also on the East Coast, in Dartmouth, N.S., {the Air Dales of Coward's Cove}. Each of these navies's had, & has had, its share of characters, events, incidents, stories & traditions. I doubt therefore that anyone will ever remember &/or capture all the 'Salty Dips' of the R.C.N., which are told & re-told, time & again, wherever 'matelots' meet or assemble -- be it in a pub; a hotel room; a mess; or during a reunion.

Every group of 'matelots' whether they are from different ships, or different barracks, on the East or West Coast, have & will gladly relate their own favourite 'Dips'. However, the events related in this particular collection, with the exception of two, occurred during the twenty years between 1946 & 1966 in H.M.C.S. Shearwater - - Canada's Naval Air station.

Regardless of location or time all the stories, with one exception, involve Canadian naval aviation 'Lower Deck' personnel. 'Lower Deck' personnel are the Chief Petty Officers {Chiefs}; the Petty Officers {PO's}; & Leading Seamen {Killicks} & below.

In late 1945 or very early '46 the Royal Canadian Air Force {R.C.A.F.} base in Eastern Passage N.S. officially became the Royal Canadian Naval Air Station {R.C.N.A.S.} Dartmouth. Sometime in 1947, R.C.N.A.S. Dartmouth was commissioned H.M.C.S. Shearwater & became the home of Canadian Naval Aviation.

From May through September 1946; the ship's company of R.C.N.A.S. Dartmouth, numbered perhaps 300 officers & men. The Leading Seamen & below lived in one of several two storied buildings, referred to as a 'Block'. The configuration or shape of a 'Block' was like a large letter 'H'. Each 'wing' of the 'H' served as sleeping quarters or dormitories. Located in the centre or cross section on each level of the 'H' were the 'heads' {toilets}, showers & wash places.

In 1946 each dormitory of '62 Block' billeted 20 men in bunk beds.

Later as Naval Air grew {1947 - 49} more 'Blocks' were opened & the 'dormitory numbers were reduced to 10 men per dormitory – in single beds -- & later still {1950} these dormitories were divided into cabins with two men per cabin.

In the military environment of 1946, life was easy; because it was completely controlled. A young serviceman -- & in 1946 we were young -- did not have to think. A person under 20 years of age was referred to as 'UA'. Being UA &/or an Ordinary Seaman he was told when to wake up; when to sleep; what to wear; when & what to eat; what he may or may not do in any given circumstance; when he might go ashore; when his leave expired & at what time he was expected back aboard. He did not & was not expected to think for himself. It was not unusual to be told or hear; "Don't think! Wrap up! {Shut up} just do as you're told!"

If one was classed as 'UA' -- as we all were -- one was not allowed into the 'Wet' canteen where the beer was sold. However, there were many ways around that. Also, while one was 'UA', or had less than a year's seniority, shore leave expired at midnight.

Permission was required to participate in any unusual or irregular action or event, not described or normally permitted in the Ship's or Barrack's Standing Orders. To gain that permission a properly filled out & completed 'Request Form' with the correct wording & phrasing, was submitted to, & through, the person's Divisional Officer.

If the request was beyond the Divisional Officer's authority, you were referred to & later paraded as a 'Requestman' before the Commander. Commander's Requestmen were held at 0830 every day in the Administration Building. Commander's 'Defaulters' were also held daily but they were dealt with after any 'Requestmen'.

A 'Defaulter' was some one who had been disobedient; insubordinate; insolent; or was guilty of some violation of military conduct & for which some senior person felt punishment was necessary. One could become a 'Defaulter' for any violation, not only of the Ship's Standing Orders, or their Squadron's Standing Orders, but also the more serious rules & regulations found in K.R.A.I. {King's Rules & Admiralty Instructions} -- later Q.R.A.I. {Queen's Rules & Admiralty Instructions}. These 'Rules', -- in effect since the time of Nelson -- governed & controlled every moment or aspect of a service man's life -- eating, breathing, awake or asleep. An insolent or 'dirty look', for example, was considered to be "Silent Contempt" & as such was a chargeable offence!

A 'Defaulter' was paraded before the Commander who, depending on the severity of the charge, deliberated & passed judgement. His judgement was the type & amount of punishment the 'Defaulter' must fulfill. Certain violations had a laid down or standard amount of punishment. For example, a person would be awarded 3 days 'stoppage of leave & pay' for every hour they were 'adrift'. This punishment was referred to as '3 days scale'.

The principle difference between a 'Requestman' and a 'Defaulter' was that as a Requestman -- after 'doubling' {running} into the Commander's Office -- one was ordered, "Salute!", after which one stood -- at attention -- while the 'request' was read aloud to the Commander. When & if asked, one could explain the reason for, or any circumstances surrounding the request. The atmosphere while formal & strict was not unpleasant. Any logical or reasonable request was not usually denied.

A Defaulter however, after doubling into the Commander's office, was ordered, "Off Cap!" The Defaulter then remained, at attention, bareheaded & silent, while any charge or charges were read aloud by the Master at Arms to the Commander. The 'Defaulter' remained bare headed & unspeaking, throughout any discussions or investigatory comments which might occur between the Commander; the person responsible for making the charge; the Defaulter's Divisional Officer & the punishment decision. While the 'Defaulter' might be asked for an excuse he normally was not spoken to. For a brief period, H.M.C.S. Shearwater did have a Commander who, when asking the Defaulter for his excuse, would preface the question with;

"Tell me something I have never heard & I'll dismiss your case."

The Commander would then rebut the excuse by relating when, where & how often he had heard the story. Not many cases were dismissed!

Any statement, or comment resembling a question, was usually rhetorical in nature & a reply, was not expected. If the 'Defaulter' attempted to speak without permission he was loudly & sharply ordered by the Master at Arms to "Keep Silent!"

If a request or violation was beyond the Commander's sphere of authority the Requestman -- or the Defaulter -- was referred to the Captain. A person could be a Commander's Requestman or Defaulter any day of the week. Captain's Requestmen & Defaulters however, were held just once a week -- on Thursdays.

Throughout the entire discipline aspect of our lives there were rank & class levels with privileges & obligations attached. The Canadian Navy's philosophy was; if one became envious of the privileges afforded to a higher rank, then one would strive to be promoted to that rank & gain those privileges. Shore Leave for an Ordinary Seaman for example, expired at Midnight while an Able Seaman was permitted to stay ashore all night.

As time passes it is becoming more & more difficult to recall the names & faces of the many people, who served in H.M.C.S. Shearwater, between 1946 & 1966. Some served for longer than those twenty years & some served only three. Perhaps the people & times one remembers most are those with whom one served during their formative or introductory naval years. For me that was, 1946 through 1951 -- my first five years of Canadian Naval Air. Some of my mess mates served their whole career in the Lower Deck while others became officers & moved to the Wardroom {Officer's Mess}. It matters not because, in my memory's passing parade, when, at different times some reminder occurs, I think of yesteryear & those simple carefree days. I recall the faces & again hear the voices. Once more, we are eighteen; all the same rank & all immortal - - again.

As members of the Canadian Naval Air Branch we saw R.C.N.A.S. Dartmouth grow from approximately 300 officers & men in 1946 to over 3000 by 1966.

During the summer of 1946-- if & when 18 CAG {Carrier Air Group} -- with their 18 aircraft & perhaps 150 officers & men were embarked in H.M.C.S. Warrior -- there remained ashore -- not counting Officers or Chiefs & Petty Officers -- only 16 files, 3 deep, of Leading Seamen & below.

From May through August I remember all 48 of us 'falling in' twice a day, outside of 62 Block, to march to work. Excluding 18th CAG, R.C.N.A.S.' assortment of aircraft was varied & few. One hangar housed 743 Squadron; which consisted of 3 Swordfish; 1 Sea Otter; & 1 Walrus. All were left over from the Royal Navy's war time Wireless & Air Gunnery School. In another hangar there were a couple each of Ansons & Harvards. These, plus a few Seafires -- perhaps 18 or 20 aircraft in total was Canadian Naval Air.

From that few we grew to two Carrier Air Groups with four squadrons; two Helicopter squadrons {HU 21; & HS 50}; a Training squadron {VU 32}; an Experimental squadron {VX 10}; a Naval Air Maintenance School {N.A.M.S.}; an Observer Mates school; a Central Maintenance Hangar {Z-2} with Pneumatic; Hydraulic; & Propeller shops; Sheet Metal & Machine shops {5 Hangar}; an Armament Sect'n; an Electrical Bldg; a Safety Equipment Sect'n; A new Gymnasium complete with swimming pool; and a new barracks building -- Warrior Block -- Shearwater's large central living quarters -- all this by September 1966 -- 20 years.

While I remember & dedicate these reminiscences to all, there are a few who particularly stand out. I especially remember 'Red' -- who dove off the Dartmouth Ferry on a \$2 bet; & 'Ernie' -- who went to jail because of the Ferry incident; or 'Blackie' -- who bailed us out after the Ferry incident; there was 'Moose' -- who loudly called out & told the waitress in the 'Green Latrine' {Lantern} restaurant to make sure there were plenty of 'shit-bags' in his Clam Chowder {'shit bag soup'}; & 'Norman Edward', who would drink a bottle of vodka before he became brave enough to see the dentist, & cried at every funeral; or 'Arthur H.' who gave the policeman 50 cents for his horse & then rode the horse into the bar in Quantanamo City, Cuba.

Do you remember the Saturday night dances in the old gym? Can you remember the North Woodside girls who attended every weekly dance? Does any one remember 'Elsa' the Butcher's daughter, who looked like & came dressed as 'Daisy Mae' to our Sadie Hawkins dance? Do any of you recall the trainee nurses from the Nova Scotia Hospital? Remember, the beer at the 'Wets' was only 50 cents a quart? We would drink three; then buy a fourth & put it in our Burberry pocket & stagger down the road to the gym & the dance. A large packet of 'Players' cost only a quarter. On dance nights we would splurge & smoke 'tailor mades'. Not the normal daily, self rolled 'sailor mades'. One could have a hell of a night on just \$3.

Messmates, though many of you are gone, none are really forgotten. The Naval Air we knew may have -- like the old soldiers -- faded away. However, as long as the happy times live in your memory, as they do in mine, our Naval Air will never die.

Our Base -- Shearwater or Dartmouth -- which ever you wish to call it -- has changed. The wooden 'Blocks', those fire traps in which we first lived, are gone; the entire hangar area is changed with new, more modern permanent facilities, replacing the old spooky, eerie, wooden hangars. Remember those long, long nights, fighting to stay awake, while standing Hangar Sentry?

If you can not recall these things, there is perhaps another place to visit which could refresh your memory. Take a few minutes & quietly walk through Shearwater's Naval Air Museum. You might remember it as two buildings -- the Church of England Chapel & the old gym. As you walk through study the displays; closely peruse the photographs; view the different aircraft; look at the various Squadron or Ships' crests; recognize & realise, that what you are re-visiting was your life!

Messmates; reach out; touch & run your hands over the wall tiles as you read the names; do you recall the faces? Memories will crowd & flood your brain; while acknowledging your past; images will flow through your mind; you may feel a few tears of remembrance. You will think of the associations; the faces & the times gone by.

I guarantee -- that while you may choke up a little -- you'll recognize a friendly voice, whispering softly, "I'm tellin' you, this is no shit....."

THE CHANNEL SWIM

"This is no shit; I'm tellin' you, Whitey says he's gonna swim the fuckin' Channel while were overseas." This was said by someone while we were sitting in the Stadacona 'Wets' in November '46. From September '46 we had been training at H.M.C.S. Stadacona's M.T.E. {Mechanical Training Establishment}. During that training period, Whitey & Daisy had become fast & virtually inseparable friends. They were destined to become Air Mechanic Electricians -- Whitey for only 5 years but Daisy for 25 years.

In mid-December '46, at the conclusion of the 3 1/2 month M.T.E. course they -- along with 46 others -- were drafted overseas; first to England; & then to various training bases, throughout U.K. for their designated Air Mechanics' Trade courses.

Whitey had declared loudly & frequently, that while stationed in U.K. he planned to swim the English Channel. Although we had often heard Whitey speak of his planned 'Channel Swim' no one really took the comments seriously. However, for several hours, every evening, Whitey -- accompanied by Daisy -- would go to H.M.C.S. Stadacona's gymnasium where Whitey would train by swimming lengths in the pool. Around midnight of December 18th 1946, the R.M.S. Samaria sailed from Halifax bound for Liverpool, into one of the worse than normal North Atlantic December gales. On board, along with the ship's crew, was our draft of 48 Canadian Sailors -- all about 18 years of age -- plus 6 Canadian soldiers of the Canadian Veterans Guard assigned to supervise & care for the 2500 German POW's -- locked in the Hold -- in transit to Europe via U.K. for repatriation.

One could not walk around the Upper Decks of the ship because the weather had rendered them out of bounds. We were rolling & bouncing around so badly that there were times when one felt & thought that he was walking on the bulkheads instead of the deck.

There were no women on board. There were no social or recreational facilities; & there certainly was no place to have a Christmas drink. All we could do is hang around, in a room, designated as our Lounge; talk to the POWs when they came up on deck for a 20 minute morning or afternoon breather; moan about the ship; the weather; the food & get on each others nerves because of the boredom.

Due to the gales & rough seas R.M.S. Samaria lost a propeller & our scheduled 5 day trip to Liverpool doubled to 10 days.

It was a very cold, stormy, wet miserable Christmas spent in mid-Atlantic. Our midnight church service did not have a normal festive air. We were young & for many, it was the first Christmas away from home. Even though we had had leave coming there had not been enough time at the conclusion of our M.T.E. courses for anyone living west of Toronto to get home before going overseas. We all knew it was going to be more than a year before we would see Canada again. Morale therefore, was not at its highest & we were just 'fed up'.

On December 26th, Boxing Day, the Chief Steward died.

He was the first ashore when we arrived in Liverpool very late one Saturday night.

The only indications of arrival were that the ship's engines had stopped; we no longer were rolling & bouncing about; the water was calm and the colour of mud. While one could see nothing through the fog, one could hear the Sunday morning church bells.

Our 'draft' was embarked -- complete with kit bags & hammocks -- onto the jetty; loaded into trucks & taken to H.M.S. Ariel for temporary billeting.

H.M.S. Ariel was a Royal Navy new entry training establishment, outside of Warrington, Lancs. The barracks was -- except for those on duty -- closed for the festive season. It was to be our home however, for about 14 days.

Somebody said, "Hey, do you guys know where we are? We're only thirty miles from Manchester! I don't know about you guys but I'm goin' first chance!"

That night two fellows -- Al & Frank -- 'jumped ship', & caught the train to Manchester. The number, presence, assertiveness & efficiency of Shore Patrol & Military Police in U.K. were something we had never experienced in Canada. One could not walk down the street in any large city in U.K. without being stopped by M.P.'s & ordered to produce a 'Pay Book', identification card, &/or leave tickets authorizing their presence.

Frank & Al disembarked from the train but, never left the confines of the station. They were immediately stopped & questioned by the M.P.'s. Having neither pay books nor leave tickets they were returned under escort to H.M.S. Ariel & cells.

The next day they were paraded as Defaulters before the Commander. He, after hearing of our non-Christmas & being sympathetic to the feelings of young sailors away from home the first time -- only awarded each of them 2 days stoppage of leave & pay.

Also the Commander -- appreciative of the conditions we had experienced & the fact that H.M.S. Ariel was virtually closed; granted long weekend leave {72 hours} to anyone not required for duty. Imagine! An eighteen year old Canadian sailor & in Manchester on New Years Eve! For those remaining 'on board' the New Years Eve festivities throughout the barracks were a sight to behold! The canteens & messes were wide open. Everyone was welcome everywhere. Visitations occurred between the 'Hands' wet Canteen; the Chief's & PO's mess; & the Wardroom {Officer's Mess}. Sober observers in the Wardroom would have noticed the frivolities between an Officer & a Wren under the Billiard table. All Rank was disregarded for that evening's activities!

Whitey & Daisy paid social calls to all the Messes. In the process they managed to become quite drunk. While visiting the Wardroom however, Daisy realized that he & Whitey had become separated. It seemed logical to Daisy that he should endeavour to find Whitey. Carrying a large bottle of beer Daisy went searching for Whitey. About the same time Daisy left the wardroom to start his search, the Commander decided to take his dog for the usual night time walk.

In front of H.M.S. Ariel's Administration Building was a small decorative sunken pool about 15 ft. in diameter & perhaps 1 foot deep.

As the Commander & his dog rounded the Admin Bldg. they came upon Daisy sitting in the snow beside the frozen, ice & snow covered surface, drinking his bottle of beer, silently contemplating the pool. "I say, Young man, what are you doing here?" queried the Commander.

Without looking up or acknowledging the questioner Daisy replied, "Waiting for Whitey".

The Commander while looking around asked: "Where is Whitey?"

Daisy, still not looking up, gestured to the frozen snow & ice covered pond & said: "In swimmin'". Puzzled, the Commander viewed the pristine surface of undisturbed snow & ice covering the pond. Before he could speak however, Daisy looked up & said, "You might as well fuck off 'cos he ain't gonna come up while you're around". "Oh, very well," replied the Commander as he returned to the Wardroom.

SHEARWATER'S BELL.

"This is no shit! I'm tellin' you – Auburn rang the fuckin' bell".

The incident involving Air Mechanic Auburn & H.M.C.S. Shearwater ship's bell occurred one morning following his class' celebration for completing their basic Air Mechanic course. H.M.C.S. Shearwater's Administration Building although only a single story in height remained the described "H" type configuration.

All the offices were down or along both sides of each wing. The 'Heads' & wash places were still located in the centre cross section.

Throughout the Admin building the decks were highly polished. Everything was 'Ship Shape & Bristol fashion'. One did not even speak too loudly or walk heavily in this building. Inside & on each side of the front entrance into the Admin Building were 'roped off' areas with polished, waist high brass stanchions, supporting white, nautically decorative knotted ropes, suspended & draped between the stanchions.

Immediately inside & on the left of the entrance, was a roped off sanctum sanctorum area, within which hung the engraved, highly polished, ship's bell. With a white knotted, plaited bell rope, this gleaming symbol of all things naval -- in silent splendour hung. One automatically knew to walk & speak softly in the area of 'The Bell'.

Although we were not required to salute when passing we knew this area demanded the same respect as one paid to the Quarter Deck on a man-of-war. Wherever & whenever possible, one avoided using the front entrance into the Administrative Building.

The only person or persons permitted to approach within either of the roped off areas were those who polished the deck & our gleaming symbol of legitimacy – 'The Bell'.

After entering & passing the area of 'The Bell' the Commander's, plus the Commissioned Master at Arms' offices were at the far end of the right wing of the Admin Building.

The Captain's Office, after entering & passing the area of 'The Bell', was at the far end of the left wing of the Admin Building.

H.M.C.S Shearwater was commissioned in 1947 but 'The Bell' – except for polishing – had never been touched & most certainly never rung. 'The Bell' still hangs in the Shearwater museum. It is however, no longer the un-rung pristine virgin of 1947 because -- in 1951 'The Bell' was violated! It was rung by a not completely sober trainee Air Mechanic named Auburn.

Less than 5' tall, Auburn was a slightly built popular young man, liked by everybody, with a mischievous smile & features. Plus the God given capability to think quickly & bravely reply with witty rebuttal. In 1951 I was the 'Killick' {Leading Seaman} in charge of one wing of 62 Block. In that wing there were 10 cabins which billeted 20 young trainee Air Mechanics during their 6 month Air Mechanic course at H.M.C.S. Shearwater's Naval Air Maintenance School {N.A.M.S.}.

As the 'Killick' of that wing of the Block I was responsible for the safety, conduct, cleanliness, punctuality & adherence to military practices of these 20 young trainees.

One night I came back aboard around midnight & from one of the cabins at the far end of the block I heard voices—laughing, singing & joking.

I opened the door of the cabin & was greeted by approximately 8 young trainee Air Mechanics with what was left of a small barrel of beer.

They had completed their Basic Air Mechanic course & when their celebration 'Smoker' had ended brought the beer back to the block.

"Hey, Hooky, have a fuckin' beer."

"Yeah, come on. The fuckin' course is over & its time to relax. Have a beer."

"OK, thanks". As I drank the beer, I reminded them, "Remember you guys have Captain's Request men in the morning & you gotta' be sober. You fuck up & I carry the can".

"Don't worry 'Hooky'. We're gonna' be OK. By 0800 we'll be bright eyed & bushy tailed."

With that I told them to be a little quieter; to get their 'head down' {go to bed} & I left. At 0830 the next morning my new – soon to be -- Air Mechanics mustered -- as Request Men -- in the Admin building's hallway outside the Commander's office.

They were scheduled as - Requestmen - to first see the Commander & then about 45 minutes later -- because they were being promoted – to see the Captain.

The common practice was to wait the brief interim period between Commander's & Captain's Requestmen, quietly having a cigarette in the 'Heads' located in the Building's centre section.

This Thursday morning the conversation in the 'Heads', somehow turned to H.M.C.S. Shearwater's large decorative, gleaming, never rung, brass bell, safely ensconced behind the roped off area inside the Admin Building's entrance.

The questions or arguments were – by the not completely sober young Air Mechanics -- Why was the Bell never rung?

Following some discussion, Auburn's comments apparently were;

"You know, nobody ever rings that fuckin' bell. Why have it if nobody ever rings the fuckin' thing?"

Someone said, "Who knows & who cares? Every ship's got one."

"I think if you have a fuckin' ship's bell the bastard should be rung like it's supposed to be," continued Auburn. "That's what the fuckin' navy's all about, ain't it?"

Auburn suddenly asked, "What's the fuckin' time?"

Somebody said, "0915."

"Right" said Auburn. "At 0930 I'm gonna' go ring that fuckin' bell".

"Don't be stupid," said one.

"Bullshit!" said another.

"Don't do it! You'll get in the shit", said a third.

Just before 0930 Auburn walked out of the 'Heads', down the Admin. Building hallway to the entrance; stepped over the white ropes draped & suspended between the brass 'stanchions' into that pseudo 'Quarter Deck' area; took hold of the fancy knotted bell rope & at precisely 0930; correctly rang the bell. BONG BONG --- BONG.

The Admin building virtually erupted! Office doors flew open & people poured into the hallways! What was that sound? From where did it come? All heads & eyes were turned looking in the direction of the front entrance roped off area inside of which were Auburn & 'The Bell'.

While Commander Groos & the Commissioned Master at Arms, Mr. Isherwood flew down the hall from the right; Captain Raymond & his Secretary were seen moving quickly up the hall from the left. All converging on short in stature, Auburn, standing meekly inside the roped off area beside 'The Bell', with a boyish grin on his face, while the bell rope still gently swung.

"Did you ring the bell", loudly demanded Commander Groos.

"Yeah", said Auburn."

"Yeah what?" demanded Mr. Isherwood?

"Yeah, I rang the fuckin' bell", said Auburn.

"Did you have permission to ring the bell?" asked the Commander.

"No," said Auburn.

"No what?" demanded Mr. Isherwood again.

"No I didn't have permission to ring the fuckin' bell" replied Auburn.

"What about 'Sir' when speaking to an officer?" injected Commissioned Master at Arms Mr. Isherwood.

"Oh, yeah, -- sir," remarked Auburn, looking at Commander Groos.

The Captain who had been quietly observing, & sensing something rather humorous said in a calm voice, "Tell me son, why did you ring the bell?" Captain Raymond was well over 6' tall with many years of service; while Auburn, not 5' tall & looking quite small in his naval uniform, had less than a year's service.

Auburn, in reply to this less demanding query, sidled up beside the Captain & standing very close, looked up & quietly, with a friendly nudge of his elbow -- looking almost like a Saturday Evening Post cover -- said to Captain Raymond, "Well you know what it's like in the navy, sir, 0930 always ring the fuckin' bell."

Auburn was taken back to the Commander's Office as a Defaulter; received a \$5 fine & when dismissed went down the hall to join the rest of his classmates as a Captain's Requestmen to be promoted to Able Seaman Air Mechanic.

ANNUAL MEDICALS

"Hey! Did you hear what Auburn did during his medical? "Well, this is no shit but ..."

For a number of years the government sponsored a UNTD {University Naval Training Division} program. Any member of the U.N.T.D program came to a ship or other military establishment for four months summer training relative to their branch. H.M.C.S. Shearwater would annually receive about four, third year medical students, assigned to the Sick Bay. May through August was the U.N.T.D. training period & during that 4 month period -- the Ship's Company -- department by department or Squadron by squadron -- were paraded to the Sick Bay & received their annual medicals from these trainee doctors.

After marching from N.A.M.S. to Sick Bay the 'hands' were ordered, "When you get inside keep silence; strip to the waist & line up in the hallway". "After you have received your medical; get dressed & wait outside until everyone is done & we'll march back to N.A.M.S." "Remember no fuckin' around -- just stand fast & have a smoke". "Meanwhile -- wrap up & keep silent!"

This was preparatory to entering a large room set aside for the medicals. Inside this room there were 4 stops or stations -- one at each U.N.T.D. Medical Student.

First stop was Med Student #1; who requested & recorded your name; rank; official number.

Next stop Med Student #2; where one stepped on the scales while the student Dr. recorded height & weight.

Third stop was at Med Student #3; who listened -- chest & back -- with a stethoscope to lungs & heart.

Fourth stop was Med Student #4 where one would drop their gear {pants} while the student felt for any rupture. Upon completion the Med Student #4 would direct the person to turn around; bend over & spread their buttocks. The Med Student then, with a flashlight, checked for haemorrhoids. Everything was going OK. I had marched the class to Sick Bay where all were lined up properly & quietly along the hallway -- stripped to the waist preparatory for entry into the room set aside for these medicals. No trouble!

However, with Auburn in the class, one always held their breath anticipating something for which one -- as the person in charge -- could be held accountable. For this purpose I stood in line directly behind Auburn as we entered & proceeded through the process. Everything went fine until we got to Med Student #4 -- the 'Nuts & Bolts' check up. Med Student #4 -- after checking Auburn for any rupture or venereal disease, said, "Alright turn around, bend over & spread your buttocks." Which Auburn did. The Med Student while directing his flashlight at Auburn's anus said, "Any problems down there?" Auburn's quick retort was, "No Sir. No complaints from the boys yet."

With that remark Auburn straightened up; buttoned up his trousers, grinned at me & walked away. As Auburn jauntily left, Med Student #4's flashlight went flying; gasping for air-- showing all the signs of apoplexy -- tried to catch both his flashlight & his breath while wondering what he had heard. Meanwhile all composure within the medical examination room was devastated. The room erupted in gales of laughter & comedic comments. I collapsed & leaned on the wall for support, thinking -- "Ah shit."

BONNIE'S MASCOT

"This is no shit! I'm tellin' you; the skipper's got the Cox'n, the Bos'n, and the Master at arms, along with the whole fuckin' Regulating department, searching the ship for a fuckin' horse." In 1957 Canada commissioned the H.M.C.S. Bonaventure in Belfast, Ireland.

On board were 2 crew members who could get into many types of mischief. Their names were Al Downey & Scotty Guthrie. Al was part of the Flight Deck party while Scotty belonged to one of the squadrons on board.

At approximately 2300 – the night before we sailed -- Al & Scotty attempted to bring a horse up the gangway & on board. Their argument to the Officer of the Watch at the ‘brow’ was that the horse was to become the ship’s mascot & they were going to keep it in ‘C’ hangar. After all H.M.C.S. Shearwater had 2 dogs ---Newfie & Teddy. They argued that there had been a racoon on H.M.C.S. Magnificent. Why then couldn’t Bonnie have a horse as mascot?

They & the horse were ordered ashore & told to get rid of the animal & get back aboard. They disappeared into the dark of the jetty. Later Al -- who as part of his normal Flight Deck duties drove the jumbo crane used for lifting deck crashes -- returned on board -- alone.

Approximately 15 minutes later the Officer of the Watch & the Corporal of the Gangway, heard a noise from above. Leaning outboard & looking up they could see the arm of the jumbo crane extended out over the ship’s side lowering an aircraft belly band {sling} down to the jetty. Below, on the jetty awaiting the sling, was Scotty with the horse. The obvious plan was for Scotty to put the sling around the horse, & then Al would hoist the horse inboard.

The Officer of the Watch & the Corporal of the Gangway immediately put paid to that exercise. We sailed for Halifax & home the next day. Everyone talked & laughed about some one trying to bring a horse on board as mascot.

Two days out at sea a small pile of horse manure was discovered near the Captain’s cabin in the area of the Wardroom. Forty-eight hours later more signs of horse were found-- but this time on the Bridge near the captain’s sea cabin. Later that day further signs were discovered in areas frequented by the Officers – namely the Wardroom Flats.

The Commodore met with his Executive Officer; along with Commander “E”; Commander “Air”; the Cox’n; the Master –at-arms; & the Chief Bos’n Mate, ordering that the Horse was to be found & the culprits who brought it on board punished.

The Officer on duty the night the ‘horse’ incident occurred was questioned as was the Corporal of the Gangway. Both admitted that the effort to bring a horse on board had occurred – no horse however, was – to their knowledge brought aboard! Scotty & Al were also questioned but, explained they -- as ordered -- had returned the horse to the fellow from whom they had bought it.

A diligent & thorough search was conducted throughout the Ship. However, no horse was found. To this day there are those, who believe & claim that Scotty & Al did somehow get the horse on board & it was successfully hidden -- somewhere. Their belief was substantiated & perpetuated because frequently for the next 2 months, the Captain, Commander & the Cox’n --every once in a while—would discover small traces that a horse had recently passed by. These indications showed up in the most disconcerting locations & at the most inopportune times.

To this day no one is sure of what happened to Bonnie’s mascot?

Duty AT & The ‘Flag’.

“No Shit! I’m telling you, we won’t have to worry about that fuckin’ flag much longer.”

This was said by one of the P.O.’s upon entering the P.O.’s Crew Room in Z-2 Hangar.

Z-2 Hangar was the central maintenance hangar for all of H.M.C.S. Shearwater. One of the duties for the Petty Officers employed in Z-2 Hangar was to stand the Duty Air Technician {Duty AT} watch. This duty occurred about every 30 days. Ostensibly this duty was one of security but in reality it was to render assistance in the event of a crash during any night flying exercises.

Primarily the duty consisted of ensuring that the correct people for the Duty Crash Crew were there & 'closed up'; ensuring sufficient bedding was issued for the half dozen people involved; signing & taking responsibility for the Duty Engineering Officer's jeep; making 'Rounds' with the Duty Engineer Officer; & sleeping with the Crash Crew overnight in Z-2 Hangar's Crew Room.

At 1600 each day -- the start of his over night duty -- the Petty Officer detailed as Duty AT would report to the Air Maintenance Control Office (AMCO) in Z-2 hangar & pick up the various implements necessary to stand the Duty AT watch.

First, there were the Duty AT's keys. These were a 2' long belt of keys enabling entry into every hangar or building in H.M.C.S. Shearwater plus access to the individual hangars' or buildings' key boards. Second, was the Duty AT's Log Book. This was a book containing any special orders pertinent to that night's duty. The Duty AT's log was also to record events or incidents which might occur during the silent hours of his watch?

Thirdly, were the Duty Engineering Officer's keys. This was a special key ring which provided access into places of a more confidential nature. This key ring came from the Staff Officer Engineering {Lt. J. Gruber}, assistant to Commander "E". He delivered the keys each day to the AMCO where they were picked up by the Duty AT.

Fourthly was the Duty Engineering Officer's Log Book. The equivalent of the Duty AT's log but specifically for the Duty Engineering Officer. It contained any special orders or instructions regarding the squadrons engaged in night flying plus, any other special orders for that night's duty from Commander "E". This 'Log' came from Staff Officer Engineering {Commander "E's" assistant} & was also picked up at the start of each watch in AMCO.

Finally, came the Duty Engineering Officer's Flag. The 'Flag' also came from Commander "E's" assistant & was included with all the paraphernalia picked up each day from AMCO..

The Duty AT & Duty Engineering Officer did not, except when making 'rounds', actually stand their 'watch' together. The Duty Engineering Officer remained on 'call' & slept in the Wardroom while the Duty AT stayed with the Crash Crew & Crash Truck & slept in Z-2 Hangar.

At the arranged or scheduled time the Duty AT would drive to the Wardroom; pick up the Duty Engineer & together they would make 'Rounds' of the whole of Shearwater. 'Rounds' were not made until the cessation of night flying & all work was 'secure' throughout the hangar areas. Excepting for & during 'rounds' the Engineering Officer did not require the jeep. Consequently it remained with & became the responsibility of the Duty AT.

In the event of an airfield crash the Crash Crew boarded the Crash truck & along with the Duty AT rushed from Z-2 Hangar to the crash site & render what aid they could.

The Duty Engineering Officer -- was also required at any crash site but, could not get there because he did not have the jeep & 'civilian' vehicles were not authorized to drive past the hangar area.

The solution was for the Duty AT to drive the jeep to the Wardroom; pick up the Duty Engineering Officer; return to Z-2 Hangar & join the Crash Crew & proceed to the crash site. The Duty Engineering Officer would then proceed to the crash site with the jeep.

Such a procedure was unsatisfactory because of the time required to pick up the Duty Engineer from the Wardroom & the subsequent delay of the crash crew arriving at a crash site.

To solve this dilemma it was decided that the Duty Engineering Officer -- in cases of emergency, namely crashes -- would take his own car from the Wardroom to the crash site & join up with the Duty AT & Crash Crew.

That solution appeared satisfactory until someone remembered that the Ship's Standing Orders clearly directed that no personal, or other non-official, vehicles were allowed past the hangar areas or onto the air field per se. However, crash sites for night flying aircraft – especially squadrons practicing Dummy Deck Landings – do not occur in the hangar area. They occur -- albeit inconvenient -- out on the air field well beyond the perimeter of the hangar area.

To solve this dilemma yet conform to Ship's Standing Orders, the Duty Engineering Officer's car would be designated an official vehicle for & during any emergency. That decision however, presented another problem. "How was this Civilian vehicle driving onto the airfield to be identified?" No one thought to ask who, or whether anyone would, police such a violation while involved in salvaging an aircraft & its pilot? The next solution however, was the manufacture of a small flag on a short stick. This became known as the Duty Engineering Officer's 'Flag'.

The Duty Engineering Officer was to place 'The Flag' in a visible position in his vehicle's no-draft window or windshield; or hold 'The Flag' out the window, while driving to any crash site.

Regardless of the display method, with such identification the vehicle could, in the event of a crash, proceed anywhere, any time, to any area of the air field. The problem was solved. All the duties & procedures for the Duty AT were clearly explained & documented; where & which keys or log books were to be picked up; when they were picked up; when, where & to whom they should be returned.

However, none of the directives included the morning disposition of this new "Flag". 'The Flag' was included with the Duty Engineering Officers Log book & Key ring. All these were picked up by the Duty AT in Z-2 hangar's AMCO.

The Duty Engineer's Log Book & Keys were to be returned – in the morning -- to Staff Officer's Engineering desk.

But, where was the Duty AT to leave 'The Flag'? A detail not described or clarified & that omission caused confusion to many.

Normally at 0800, following the completion of his watch, the Duty AT went to breakfast. Prior to leaving he would return the Duty AT's Log Book & Keys to AMCO. He would next return the Duty Engineering Officer's Log Book & Keys to the Staff Officer Engineering's desk.

Meanwhile the Duty AT had his Leading Seaman from the Crash Crew take the jeep & return the bedding the bedding to linen stores. The Duty AT after returning the keys for the Jeep to AMCO then went for breakfast.

What about 'The Flag'? All the duties & instructions were clearly described. One knew where things were to be found & to where they were to be returned. There was however, this one exception. Where was the Duty AT to leave the Duty Engineering Officer's 'Flag' when they secured at 0800? Logically, if it was to be considered part of the Duty Engineer's materials – Log Book & Keys; which were to be left on the Staff Officer Engineering's desk, it was therefore argued, should "The Flag" not also be left on the Staff Officer Engineering's desk?

This dilemma was discussed & debated at great length during our card games & coffee in our Chief's & Petty Officer's crew room.

While no one really knew the answer; no one really cared.

It was however a matter of concern to Lt. J. Gruber, Staff Officer Engineering, & second in command to Commander 'E'.

“Leave the fuckin’ thing in AMCO & let Davidson sort it out”, said some.

Davidson was Leading Seaman “Peaches” Davidson who was responsible for the operation of AMCO. Therefore while some of us left the “Flag” in AMCO with “Peaches”, others left it on the Staff Officer Engineering’s desk.

At one time or another we had all asked Peaches, “Where the hell are we supposed to leave this fuckin’ flag?”

Peaches always said, “Who knows? Leave it here & I’ll see it gets back to Gruber OK.”

So that’s the way it was. Until one night Petty Officer Ross Archer was Duty AT. The morning following his duty, Ross ‘secured’ everything & left for breakfast leaving the ‘Flag’ on Lt. Gruber’s desk along with the other Duty Engineer Officer’s paraphernalia.

At approximately 0830 Lt. Gruber, carrying the flag, stormed into AMCO. Not waiting to see who else might be present, or what else might be occurring, waving the ‘Flag’ loudly demanded, “Leading Seaman Davidson, why was this bloody flag left on my desk?” “I don’t know sir” Peaches replied.

“Who was Duty AT last night?” questioned Lt. Gruber.

“Petty Officer Archer sir but, he’s not back yet. He should be here soon, sir.”

“The moment he returns tell him to report to me!” ordered Lt. Gruber. As he turned to leave, Ross – returning from breakfast – walked into AMCO.

A senior NCO did not receive a blast from an officer in front of a person of lesser rank. Therefore, Lt. Gruber turned to Ross & sharply said, “Petty Officer Archer come out side here with me!”

In Z-2 hangar all the administrative offices were located on a second floor mezzanine balcony which surrounded the maintenance area below. Therefore Lt. Gruber could take Petty Officer Archer out on the balcony without having a junior rank privy to any reprimand or discussion which may take place from or with a senior rank.

However, Lt. Gruber forgot to close the AMCO door so “Peaches” observed, listened & later described the following:

As Lt. Gruber & Petty Officer Ross Archer left the AMCO Lt. Gruber angrily spun around to Ross & demanded, “Petty Officer Archer, were you Duty AT last night?” “Yes sir,” replied Ross. “And who was the Duty Engineering Officer?” “Lt. Hotsenpillar sir, VU 32 Squadron.” replied Ross Lt. Hotsenpillar & Lt. Gruber were good friends. Therefore, Lt. Gruber, not wanting to possibly sound critical regarding the actions of a fellow officer, changed the direction & immediately brought up the subject of ‘The Flag’. With impatient anger & waving the flag as an example, Lt. Gruber said, “Petty Officer Archer, could you not think of any other place to put this bloody flag but on my desk?”

To which Ross calmly replied,

“Yes sir, one other.” “But Lt. Hotsenpillar was too fast on his feet, sir.”

With that Ross turned & walked back into AMCO where Peaches lay draped across the desk in laughter while Lt. Gruber angrily speechless, strode down the mezzanine balcony to his office.

We never did get any definitive direction about the flag’s disposal & after while someone threw it away & it was forgotten

“IS THAT YOUR BEST CAP BADGE ?”

“No Shit! I’m tellin’ you, the Chief’s got to muster his bag!”

“Did you guys hear what Budge said?” “No? Well this is no shit, the Chief has got to muster his kit.”

During a Ship's or Barracks' annual inspection the Flag Officer Atlantic Coast & all his staff descend 'en masse' for approximately a week. During that period everything is examined. All administrative operations & personnel functions are closely scrutinized & reviewed. Annual inspections usually ended on Friday culminating with 'Divisions' – the formal inspection of every man in the Ship's Company. 'Divisions' for H.M.C.S. Shearwater meant that the Ship's Company was formed into 4 different – A;B;C; & D Companies. The Admiral would randomly select a Company for his personal inspection while the other Companies would be inspected by a designated senior officer of the Admiral's staff. We were "A" Company & the Officer designated to inspect our company was Commodore Patrick Budge {Patty to all}.

Budge had come up 'through the hawse'. He originally joined as a boy seaman back in the 1930's & had been promoted through the ranks. Pat Budge was liked & respected. People told stories – like this one – about Pat Budge. Always quick & sharp with his remarks but, Commodore Budge never left you feeling degraded or insulted by his criticism or reprimand.

As his inspection took him through the ranks of men 'Pat' recognized & acknowledged old ship mates & would briefly stop to speak or remark on the appearance of a person or recall some incident. It was summer 1960. Twelve months earlier the Navy had been presented new colours by Queen Elizabeth. Three of us – one Chief & 2 Petty Officers -- had been selected from Shearwater for the Royal Guard. The training & standards required for the 1959 Royal Guard, though rigorous, ensured that our uniforms & appearance were perfect & without criticism.

Now in 1960, for Shearwater's annual inspection by Flag Officer Atlantic Coast, every man in the naval air station was on parade & looking his very best in his #1 uniform, gold badges, medals & boots glistening on this sunny Friday afternoon.

On my right was Chief Petty Officer Keith MacDonald. Keith was part of the Officer's Candidate program & was always – even in working clothes -- smartly turned out.

Commodore Budge, stopped in front of Keith & said, "Smartly turned out Chief". "Thank you sir", replied Keith. Commodore Budge took one smart side closing pace right & standing directly in front of me said, "You too, Petty Officer. By the way, weren't you in the Queen's Guard last year?" "Yes sir, Left Guide, Front Rank." "Yes, I remember. Very smart," was Commodore Budge's final remark as he took another side closing **pace** to his right placing him directly in front of a Chief Petty Officer.

While the Chief was dressed in his #1 uniform, it was showing signs of wear & usage. Perhaps the last place he should have stood was near Keith or me. The Commodore paused, critically & slowly looked the Chief up & down. Those of us within earshot inwardly cringed. You knew something was about to happen or be said.

Then Commodore Budge quietly – almost inaudibly asked, "Chief, is that your best cap badge?" A rhetorical question for which there is no reply. Following a brief pause, Commodore Budge continued, "I put on my best one to come & see you?" Commodore Budge then turned & continued his inspection. As Commodore Budge walked away however, Master at Arms Gillis, like a hovering vulture, immediately descended on the Chief saying,

"What's your name Chief?" "Report to the Regulating Office tomorrow at 1000 & muster your kit."

"The Commander & I use the same tailor"

"No Shit. I'm tellin' you Knapp said it & got away with it!"

In 1948 the Ship's routine was to hold 'Divisions' every Saturday morning. It was December & we were wearing great coats because of the wind & cold.

Several styles of Great Coats would be seen when on parade. Most were permissible but some styles, although they were worn, & you might get away with it, were not.

The Pusser -- really legal -- issue style Great Coat for men had a very high collar which would completely cover your ears. It had an adjustable belt that passed through the back that allowed one to tighten or loosen the waist. It also had a double breasted, 3 black buttons closure & came down below one's knees.

One's 'Tiddley' great coat was also double breasted but was tailored. It was made of better than issue serge material, with a smaller more conventional collar & looked like a regular man's top coat. These were a little shorter than the Pusser's issue but still retained the double breasted, 3 black button closing. Tiddley great coats with only 2 button closings were not allowed.

The belt however, across the back of either 2 button or 3 button 'Tiddley' great coats was not adjustable. The 'Belt' was sewn in place like a normal civilian top coat.

There was one more style of great coat seen at & during every 'Divisions'. This 'Coat' however, was definitely not part of a seaman's kit. The coat was strictly for senior officers -- I believe the 'Coat' was described as, or was called -- a 'Bridge Coat'. No one below the rank of Commander wore this style of coat. The 'Coat' can only be described as being double breasted, very neatly tailored, form fitting to the waist, three quarter length above the knees, epaulets on the shoulders revealed the rank. The 'Coat' had brass buttons & was made from an excellent serge material.

This 'Bridge Coat' was form fitting & had no belt of any kind. It is the lack of a 'Belt' which is the crux of this tale.

Bob & I had been ashore the night before. During that run & after having a couple of 'wets', some sort of accident had occurred. One end of the half belt had come loose from its seam in the back of Bob's 'Tiddley' great coat. With Divisions being Saturday morning there was neither time nor method to have things properly repaired. Bob's 'pussers' great coat was rolled-up in his kit bag & not fit to be worn. The only solution therefore was to carefully remove the 'Belt' from Bob's 'Tiddley' great coat altogether & hope no one noticed.

Carefully manipulating a razor blade Bob opened the remaining seam & removed the half 'Belt' from the great coat. We proceeded to divisions & 'fell in' with the rest of our squadron, where we would be initially inspected by our Divisional Officer prior to the Captain's arrival.

The Commander -- also waiting for the Captain's arrival & the commencement of Divisions -- to ward off the cold, was smartly pacing backwards & forwards in front of the inspecting dais, wearing the previously described 'Bridge Coat'. Various comments were muttered in the ranks regarding his appearance. It was noted that while his coat was very well tailored, fit beautifully, it did not have a belt & it certainly was not like what we were wearing. I remarked to Bob with a smile, "See he doesn't have a belt either, so don't worry about it".

The inspection process consisted of the inspecting officer walking along the front rank looking at each person. Noting, correcting & commenting on appearance where necessary or advisable.

The inspecting officer, after inspecting the front of the front rank, would return to his original starting point by walking behind & inspect the backs of the men in the front rank. Again advising, correcting or commenting as required. The inspecting officer would then do the same procedure to the second & third ranks.

Our Divisional Officer, while inspecting the rear of our front rank stopped behind Bob. Quietly speaking over Bob's right shoulder & between the two of us said,

"Able Seaman Knapp, you have no belt on the back of your great coat."

To which Bob without hesitation & as if the comment had been expected replied, "No Sir. The Commander & I use the same tailor".

"Oh, very well", commented the Divisional Officer & continued his inspection.

Conclusion

All the preceding 'Dips' occurred prior to 1960. In the later years of one's service career the humour lay in the reliving & relating of these past events or extolling & criticizing the faux pas of our leaders. Sometimes though, an incident, an individual event or a comment occurs, which serves to remind us that the 'Navy' we knew is passing or has gone. It also, somewhat brutally, reminds us that we -- like our navy -- are also passing. Although one hasn't thought of it, not everyone -- especially those junior to us, both in length of service or rank -- has experienced the things with which we matured.

"You know PO, I heard about that."

A normal Friday morning in P.O.'s Mess at Shearwater, consisted of cleaning & polishing throughout the Mess -- Lounge & Bar areas -- preparatory for 'Rounds' {inspection}. The usual Friday morning 'Rounds' were conducted by the Commander. Occasionally, although not scheduled, the Captain would join the Commander for these 'Rounds'.

A cleaning party of 2 or 3 Ordinary Seamen Air Mechanics were 'detailed off' from the larger Warrior Block cleaning party & sent next door, for cleaning, washing, polishing throughout the PO's "Mess". Just prior to the Commander or Captain's arrival & after everything was "ship shape & Bristol fashion" the Mess President -- who would be reporting the mess ready for inspection to the Captain or the Commander upon their arrival -- would slip into his office & put on a clean shirt, retie his tie, & replace his linen cap cover with a clean, fresh cover.

Historically the navy had had different uniforms for winter, spring & summer wears. In the winter those in 'Round' rig wore a blue wool sweater {jersey} under our 'jumpers' (tunic) & wore blue caps. In the spring the jersey was changed to a cream, almost white, flannel singlet with a blue border stripe across the neck aperture & the blue caps were changed for white. Later in the summer the cream coloured flannel was replaced by a similar but cotton white front.

For those in 'Square Rig' -- Commissioned Officers, Chief Petty Officers & first class Petty Officers -- spring or summer merely meant changing the cover on their hat. The navy blue cap of winter would be covered by a white linen cap cover.

In 1946 naval policy changed when it was decided that white caps would be worn all year long. The heretofore blue hats of winter were discarded for a year round -- sometimes plastic -- white hat. However, many of the Chiefs or Petty Officers retained their old blue cloth peaked hats & continued the practice of changing to a clean linen cap cover when required. This was not done in defiance to change but the older style hat was lighter, softer, and more comfortable. With the grommet removed the hat had character & personality which the newer style, stiff rimmed plastic hats did not.

One Friday the Mess President was in the process of changing preparatory to receiving the Commander for the inspection.

As the Mess President was changing his cap cover -- which entailed removal of the hat's grommet, lining up seams & fitting the cover over the hat-- a young Ordinary Seaman, of the cleaning party, walked past the open office door & noticed what the Mess President was doing.

The Ordinary Seaman did in fact do -- what they call in the movies -- a double take. With a somewhat amazed, wide eyed or confused look on his face the young sailor said, "P.O. your cap is blue?" "Yeah, replied the Mess President, "I'm just changing my cap cover".

He then went on to explain, "We used to wear blue caps all winter & white caps only in summer." With an acknowledging nod, the young Ordinary Seaman said, "Oh".

Then starting to turn & walk away, looked directly at the Mess President, & quizzically remarked, “You know P.O., I heard about that”.

When the Commander arrived the Mess President saluted & fighting back the tears, reported; “Petty Officer’s Mess Ready for inspection sir”.

Who was Mussolini, PO?

A similar incident occurred in Warrior Block, on a Sunday afternoon in early 1959. Two thirds of Warrior Block was the living quarters for H.M.C.S. Shearwater’s leading seamen & below. The remaining portion -- with a separate entrance -- was the Petty Officer’s mess & housed the 20 first & second class P.O.’s living on board. Inside Warrior Block’s main entrance was a large lobby with Admin office space. Off this Lobby was a Lounge area where the ‘Hands’ watched Television, played cards, ping-pong, & socialized.

This particular Sunday, Willie Knox – who actually lived next door in the P.O.’s Mess, was Duty Disciplinary Petty Officer. The Duty Disciplinary P.O. performed his duties from the Admin Office in the front lobby of Warrior Block. As Duty Disciplinary Petty Officer, Willie therefore was required to periodically muster any Blacklist Men {men under punishment} & to be visible & available, in case of any emergencies or personnel problems.

To pass the time however, yet still be easily visible & readily available if required, -- the Duty Disciplinary P.O. could watch television in the near-by ‘Hands’ recreation lounge. The TV program that Sunday was a documentary, hosted by Walter Cronkite. Cronkite introduced the program saying; “A day, like any other day, but you are there.” “Today we present the story of the Dictator of Italy, Benito Mussolini – Ill Duce”. Willie, leaning against one of the large pillars in the lounge remarked, “Oh. Mussolini. This could be pretty good.”

A young sailor sitting just below where Willie was leaning, overheard the comment & looking up, said, “Who was Mussolini, P.O.?” Willie sarcastically replied, “For Christ’s sake, Mussolini was one of the Axis leaders in the Second World War. We sank half his God damned navy in the Med in the ‘40s. What’s the matter with you? Don’t you remember any thing?” The young sailor again looking up at Willie, said, “P.O. I wasn’t born until 1941.” Willie muttered, “Oh God,” & came next door to the mess for a drink.

The following ‘Dip’ does not truly concern Naval Air. It does however; concern one of our more famous Admirals. His more than 30 year naval career impacted the whole of the Royal Canadian Navy. In keeping with the belief that things of a ‘Salty Dip’ nature should not be lost; it is therefore worth inclusion.

Ahead or Astern.

H.M.C.S. Ontario had just arrived from the West Coast & the Chief Bos’ns Mate, who happened to be a close friend said, “Hey Joe, have you heard what Graf Von did in the Caribbean?” “No? Well, this is no shit

Our R.C.N. has been blessed with several officers possessing intelligence & wit. For this story -- one such person comes to mind--Admiral Hugh Pullen. Throughout the navy Hugh Pullen was referred to as ‘Graf Von’. Because it was believed that he was of German descent Lieutenant Pullen had been tagged with the appellation of ‘Graf Von’ in 1936 while serving as Gunnery Officer in the original river class destroyer H.M.C.S. Skeena.

In 1949 or ‘50, Graf Von – as Commodore Pullen – was Captain of H.M.C.S. Ontario in Esquimalt, B.C. H.M.C.S. Ontario, a second world war, Colony Class cruiser, was ordered to sail ‘around the Horn’ to her new station, Halifax, N.S. In transit she was to join an element of the United States navy in the Caribbean for exercises & manoeuvres.

Following all the proper protocols of saluting one another H.M.C.S. Ontario joined the U.S.N. Caribbean fleet & other men-of-war involved in the exercises. Statistics regarding speed, size, or armament for any ship are found in special reference books available to the Captain or his Executive Officer of any navy. For some reason however, the United States Admiral in charge of these exercising ships, did not consult his reference tools.

After the welcoming salutes but, before the exercises started, the following occurred:
On H.M.C.S. Ontario's bridge, the Yeoman of signals announced, "Signal from Flagship, sir."

"Go ahead please, Yeoman".

The Yeoman then read the message aloud, "From Flag to Captain, H.M.C.S. Ontario; can you make 30 knots?"

Graf Von paused a moment & turning to the Yeoman, said,

"Yeoman, make to flag ship, "Ahead or astern?"

Further communication between 'Graf Von' & the American Admiral consisted of briefly wishing each other, farewell & good luck, as the exercises concluded & H.M.C.S. Ontario left the Caribbean for Halifax.

Admiral Hugh 'Graf Von' Pullen became Flag Officer Atlantic Coast & in that position directly – as many may recall -- impacted Naval Air.

There are many other humorous naval or military incidents, each with their ironic juxtapositions. Their re-telling however will have to wait for another day & another narrator.

Messmates, these few 'Salty Dips' belong to you. Hopefully you have enjoyed these anecdotes of our Naval Air escapades & perhaps my reminiscing has aroused or stirred a few happy memories of the circumstances or events which filled our salad years.