Months of careful planning culminated in the formal presentation of the Queen’s Colour by the Earl of Wessex onboard RFA LARGS BAY on 18 July 2008. From the initial announcement months earlier, every eventuality was brainstormed, risk assessed and cross checked, including the angle of the gangway, the provision of grandstand seating, security and media coordination. VVIP requirements were forwarded and scrutinised. The supply and organising of food and drink, from service and non service sources led to the production of over 18,000 canapés by the CPO(CK) and team and service was enhanced by the HMS RALEIGH instructors and trainees.

The weather stayed dry for the ceremony, and the cool wind was not enough to blow hats off or calm the inner excitement of the day! The Colour Party and RFA Platoon conducted their part in the Ceremonial with pride and professionalism, and the assembled guests shared that spirit with them.

After the formal ceremony VVIP guests were escorted to a reception on the bridge, and the other guests hosted on the Container deck, offered drinks and canapés, with the TAS providing a welcome wind break. Guests came from all branches of the Services, RFA ships in Port and HQ and shore side staff. Old acquaintances were renewed, stories told, and all joined in with pride at the honour and celebration at the recognition.

Much effort was put in, by many individuals, from HQ and Agencies, RALEIGH and LARGS BAY to make the day the huge success that it was, but the award of the Colour is reflected in the achievements of all connected with the Royal Fleet Auxiliary, past and present, and the best accolade to stand up for in the future.

Mike Palmar
First Officer RFA
PRO
RFA LARGS BAY
This is the last time I shall write to you in Gunline as your Commodore and I do so with mixed emotions, for although I shall miss all of you, I am pleased to have behind a Service that has risen to many challenges and continues to earn immense respect at home and around the world. When I retire on 30 September it will be some 39 years after I first joined the RFA, albeit I spent a couple of years in the commercial world—more of which later.

I had finished 3 years at Nautical School and finally realised a long-held ambition to go to sea. So 1969 was an exciting year not only because man had taken his first step onto the moon but also, my first voyage. A young Bob Thornton had set foot on an RFA for the first time. You may or may not be aware, that the RFA received a new name from the Fleet Review in Torbay in that year. This ensued different from the previous one in that the admiralty anchor was turned through 90 degrees to the fore of the ship. The harbour tugs and salvage ships retained the horizontal anchor and became the RMAS, an organisation that currently hauled down its ensign for the last time. The RFA on the other hand was getting to grips with 6 LSLs acquired to support the Amphibious Task Group (FALLS, FEARLESS, INTREPID) and the new “OLNA”, “NESS” and “REGEN” class of ships, designed and built to support the new aircraft carriers, that were subsequently cancelled. Also appearing on the scene were the first three of the new ROVER class of small fleet tankers with a couple more to come.

It is interesting to think that as I take my last step in uniform on an RFA, we have just received the Queen’s Colour and we are getting to grips with the new “BAY” class of ships, equivalent to 9 LSLs) designed and built to support the Amphibious Task Group (OCEAN, ALBION, BEFORDSHIRE). We await with eager anticipation, up to 6 of the new class of fleet tankers designed to support the new aircraft carriers QUEEN ELIZABETH and PRINCE OF WALES, that have just been confirmed and the contract to build placed. Solid Support Ships and Joint Sea Base Logistic Ships are also on the cards. So you will notice that there are some distinct similarities and some might argue that nothing has changed; but they would be wrong.

If I compare the technology of the old WWII Wave class with that of the current Wave class they are worlds apart. If I compare the capability of the ships I saw in 1969 with those of 2008, they are quite different. 39 years ago, the RFA had just introduced the concept of a training position the tutelage of a Cadet Training Officer, to move us forward from a standard Merchant Navy cadetship to something better tailored to our needs that were themselves being driven by new technology and capabilities. We still had ships crewed by Seychellois, Maltese and Hong Kong Chinese under British officers which was a mirror of shrinking empire and the wider Merchant Navy practice. The flow of people from RFA to MN and back again was easy and common, in fact after I struggled through Second Mate’s ticket in London I went off to try the UK coastal trade carrying coal from Ayr in Scotland to the power station in Barnstaple. I lasted just 1 month! Shortly afterwards I tried my hand at the recovery of marine aggregates for just short of 2 years, in the southern North Sea, mainly because I wanted to be nearer the lady who was to become my wife. Great experience and one that really broadened my understanding of the commercial sector, but I returned to my niche in the RFA for there was something quite different and special about the Service.

I am being honest when I point out that the RFA did not always enjoy the highest of reputations for a variety of reasons. I do not need to go into the detail, but suffice to try to convey the days are long past. We currently enjoy a very high reputation across the world and this is due to you, the people of the RFA, we have observed and always tried to contribute to change both afloat and ashore, for managed evolution is the very essence of our survival as an organisation. I am proud that I have contributed to our history and immensely pleased and satisfied with what has been achieved in the past few years, particularly in our recruitment, selection and training. There are marked changes in our identity, our espit de corps and our professionalism. When I first joined we simply provided fuel and stores at sea and I saw little or no contemporary warfare knowledge or abilities; there was little connection with defence objectives and expectations were limited. As I retire, I see a highly capable Service, with increasing high professional standards across the range of activities from enablement to the delivery of what is now described as military effect. I can assure you there are great expectations of the RFA and I am confident that you have the ability to deliver whatever is required of you. You must continue to improve, to adapt and to evolve if you are to deliver to the highest standard. I want to see, as I am sure you do, the blue ensign defaced with the upright admiralty anchor, continuing to adorn over some splendid ships manned by splendid people.

As I hand over the watch to Commodore Bill, it is fitting for me to do so by saying “You have the Ship” and by reminding you that you are all “A World Leader in Versatile, Valued and Integrated Afloat Support” and that you should “Stay happy but above all, stay safe”.

Commodore Bob
By 3/O (LS) Anthony Sincock

The 46th RFA Golf Event was hosted by Waterlooville Golf Club as ever on the 1st Thursday of July, in the customary glorious weather. The course was in fine condition, the Fairways remained so as they were seldom visited, bunkers aerated and greens well spliced by the to and fro of us all.

It was a change for old friends to meet, some who had not done so for 30 years or more. It was particularly good to meet, some who had not done so for 30 years or more. It was particularly good to

Seagong Steve Hayward
Retired Sean Sloggett (Gordon Ogilvie “Joe Dines Cup”) HQ and Shore Staff. Mark Griffiths Ladies. Frances Ogilvie Guests. Bill Hutton

Most sincere thanks on behalf of us all to Robin Lock who has managed the event for so far so long IZJ. The chalice moves on to Roger Cox.

It was apparent that some of our regulations were missing. Please update the mailing list to me if you did not receive this years letter or wish to be added. rodger.rb@ntlworld.com to ensure that you are kept advised of future events.

Also I am pleased to report that the Joe Dines Cup has resurfaced. If anybody can advise me who won it in 2007 please also e-mail me so it can be added to the existing colour.

However, it should be noted that there is a set way that battle honours are displayed. All World War One and World War Two battle honours are located on The Queen’s Colour while all historical and new battle honours are located on the Regimental Colour. All battle honours are in date order, and this order is the same on both sides of the colour.

Once all these dates and spellings have been checked the hand painting of the colour produced by the College of Arms is converted into a computer generated drawing. This is then used to stencil the design onto a single piece of silk. Once this stencil is committed to the silk the point of no return is reached. If anything goes wrong at this stage the whole process needs to be started from scratch.

Once this process is completed the stencilled silk will go into the workshop and the highly skilled work force begin to bring the colour to life. Each colour will require between three and six hundred hours of work depending on the complexity of the design and every stitch is done by hand.

For example, the Union Flag is cut in sections and then hand sewn together. The silk embroidery threads that are used are imported from China. The gold wire that is used has to have at least 2% gold, this is a MOD specification.

It is usual for new colours to be ordered at least a year ahead, and even with this timescale time is tight. As such the Queen’s Colour for the RFA was ordered in October 2007.

Commodore Thornton said “I was delighted to visit Hobson’s recently and for RFA/RN Phase Two Trainees at Penhale army camp. More recently they were kept busy with numerous ship’s visits as well as providing assistance to the Defence Attachés luncheon held on RFA Fort Victoria, Second Sea Lord’s Garden Party and most recently, providing excellent service to the RFA Largs Bay during the Queen’s Colour Presentation (ably supported by a contingent of RFA Trainees and Royal Navy Personnel).

The Catering Assistants have been praised for their professionalism and enthusiasm throughout their training and in high profile events, receiving thank you letters from CDR Ingham RN (Retired) and Commodore Thornton RFA. None of this would have been possible without the hard work and effort of CPO (Stwd) Tony Rennie, who after two years in situ as the first Steward Instructor at the DMLS is moving back into the billet. His efforts have been formally recognised by being awarded a DCLPA Commandant’s Commendation presented by Brigadier Wallace OBE.

We wish both Tony and the Catering Assistants good luck in their careers at sea.

CPO (CK) MARTIN ETWELL - Queen’s Colour Chief Petty Officer

By 3/O (LS) Anthony Sincock

July 18th 2008 will go down as one of the most significant days in the history of the Royal Fleet Auxiliary and this memorable occasion clearly highlights the recognition that the Service rightfully deserves. However, for CPO (CK) Etwell it will also be a day to remember for the rest of his career as he was centre stage at this historic event. I wish to extend my personal congratulations to those who paraded alongside him.

CPO (CK) Etwell said “It was an honour to be chosen to bring the colours onto the parade ground and to play a major part in this prestigious and historic event. I wish to extend my personal congratulations to those who paraded alongside me, and to say how immensely proud I am that the Royal Fleet Auxiliary has been acknowledged in this way. I would also like to thank Commodore Thornton for his personal letter of thanks”.

These successful cadets celebrated in style at Napoleon Greenwich on 21st June 2008 having graduated from Warsash Maritime College. Pictured left to right are: Claire Sullivan 1/O (X), Fiona Preece, Gavin Barron, James Wright, Mark Allaway, Josh Hawken, Stuart Smith (guests), Matt Elgar, Luke Guest and Phil Gregory 2/O (E) Cadet Development Officer.

Also graduated but not pictured are Giles Hurniss and David Matthews.

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CITATION FOR THE WORSHIPFUL COMPANY OF FUELLERS ANNUAL AWARD
FIRST OFFICER(E) SCOTT TAIT - RFA WAVE KNIGHT

Certification for the Worshipful Company of Fuellers Annual Award

First Officer Scott Tait is a very hard working, intelligent and professional First Officer Engineer and he has been deputy to the current owner Marine Engineer Officer (MEO) on a number of occasions since 2003. Specifically, during 2007 when RFA WAVE KNIGHT was deployed to the Caribbean, Tait and the reliever MEO at the time were sent to a small cargo ship whose engines were running out of fuel. With exceptionally rough weather, both engineering officers were unhappy with the condition of the engines due to lack of fuel and identified fuel leaks from the main engine. In order to keep this main engine running, after chasing the alternative engine for short period of time, both officers rigged a portable hand pump and continued to manually pump fuel into the main engine until sufficient fuel was in the service tank for sustained running. Once happy, both officers returned to RFA WAVE KNIGHT at which point Tait confessed he was suffering from the effects of sea sickness and had been throughout the activity, but had continued to assist because the ship had a far greater need to be helped than him. The ship eventually made it safely to the next port accompanied by WAVE KNIGHT.

Tait has not only demonstrated his ability to achieve results under extreme circumstances but also has a thorough understanding of the knowledge of the ship and ship's systems and has constantly made a consistent and highly valued contribution towards maintaining operational capability. With many ship systems being monitored by his department, Tait can be relied upon to advise on best practice as well as working with individual systems, specifically the ship's Chilled Water Plant and the HVAC system, to ensure that optimum conditions are maintained for running machinery. Earlier on this year, before proceeding on leave, he made a particular effort to ensure that the ship was ready for the current ORION 08, as well as using his extensive experience to compile a list of Fuel Filters and predicted filter usage for future ship's deployment. Tait's practical engineering ability is often utilised in allowing him to manufacture, modify and fix engineering components using the Ship's lathe.

As the Marine Engineering Department Cadet Training Officer, he is also willing to devote time and effort into explaining 'Engineering principles, systems and practices' to the young cadets in a manner that would make him an excellent college lecturer. In order that he may explain systems fully, it is not uncommon for him to scribble in great detail, on what ever comes to hand, and easily understood picture, which may only be described a near perfect technical drawing!

First Officer Tait is a highly professional engineer who continually demonstrates exceptional officer qualities in all aspects of his work. His experience and calm nature have paid dividends in a crisis, whilst his thorough understanding of the ship, personal pride and determination has significantly contributed to the ship as a whole. In parallel, he takes time to train those who are around him, to the benefit of all ship departments. Tait is due for retirement in the near future and will be a sadly missed asset of both RFA WAVE KNIGHT Ship's Company and the Royal Fleet Auxiliary as a whole. With his outstanding contribution, there is no member of the crew who is more thoroughly deserving of this award.

CHIEF PETTY OFFICER JEFFREY WHITE

Chief Petty Officer Jeffrey White has finally hung up his checks after 42 years service. Jeff joined his first ship TIDESPRING in Aden in 1966. During his career he has had the honour of catering for Her Majesty the Queen on RFA FORT austin for her only visit to the service. He has served on every class of ship and was the lead Chef for the Defence Sales Tours conducted in the 1980's. A collection from the Logistic Supply Departments across the flotilla and others raised a very respectable sum which enabled a number of retirement gifts to be presented to him onboard RFA FORT VICTORIA. Jeff is now taking up the role of Master and Chef onboard his canal boat cruising the inland waterways.

CAPTAIN IAN GOUGH

I joined the RFA Service in October 1976 and retired on 28th May 2008 after a long and interesting career in which I witnessed momentous world events and changes to the service. I was the owner of FORT ROSALIE since July 2003 and I was fortunate to serve with many friends in that ship. I was pleased to be able to say a personal farewell to some of them during a mess dinner on board in December 2007.

There are many people whom I have known over the years that I have not had the opportunity to say goodbye to and I would like to take this opportunity to do that through this letter. So to you all - "...I wish you smooth seas and calm winds during the remainder of your careers and in your journeys through life."
Background and Context

The RFA spends in the region of £100m per annum on the maintenance and support of its 16 vessels. Before the current reform programme, suppliers were routinely selected through competition in accordance with Public Sector Procurement rules. Typically, several hundred competitions and contracts were transacted annually, selection was based on low priced tender and arms-length supplier relationships were the norm.

Creating a Revolutionary Strategy

A Category Management Team (Commercial Ship Maintenance CMT) was formed in 2004 to work with the RFA to implement radical reform of procurement practices. The aims and objectives of the joint team were to achieve best practice procurement and target savings of over £30m through rigorous commitment to category management principles and significant improvement of relationships with its supply base.

The team, supported by procurement specialists from Atos Consulting, recommended a radical strategy to transform procurement and engineering processes. This innovative approach recognised the need for change in the way the RFA contracted future maintenance requirements as follows:

• Aggregating volume into six ship clusters to ensure competitive market facing categories (commodities or services)
• Contracting on a Through-Life-Support (TLS) basis (replacing many 100s of individual contracts)
• Developing strategic relationships with key suppliers based on beneficial joint working
• Implementing process improvement internally and externally
• Realising the RFA organisation to support the TLS strategies

Introducing Supplier Collaboration

The ship repair sector was widely consulted throughout the development of the strategy. For example, an Industry Day held in July 2004 attracted representatives from over 60 ship repairs and yards and to market facing categories (commodities or services).

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Creating Customer Buy-In

The RFA is responsible to Commander-in-Chief Fleet (CmndFleet) for the provision of readily available and capable ships. Convincing CmndFleet that reducing spend and maintaining operational commitments were both achievable was no mean task, requiring the most polished of influencing skills. In parallel, engagement of many key stakeholders was fundamental. Their confidence in the RFA’s ability to deliver was fundamental to the development of TLS.

Proving the Strategy through Innovation

Proof was needed that the strategy would deliver...enter RFA Argus. RFA Argus is a singleton Aviation Support and Primary Casualty Reception and Evacuation Vessel. In December 2005 the first of these Vessels were let between the RFA and A&P Falmouth Ltd (Ship Reparers) and the RFA and Rolls-Royce (Power Generation) to cover all Argus requirement over a 10 year period. This provided a pilot to test TLS, develop joint working practices and deliver savings. A co-located team comprising representatives from the RFA, A&P and Rolls Royce was established in the ship repair yard at Falmouth to undertake the future support and maintenance requirements of Argus. In effect, this strategy was a test bed maintenance operation prior to rolling out the strategy to all other vessels. It proved to be an invaluable experience of the strategy at work. Key Successes were:

• Savings of more than £4m have been achieved (equivalent to 20% reduction in maintenance costs)
• The ship is now routinely maintained in its best ever condition and availability has improved to outperform the customer’s operational readiness requirements
• New contracting strategies have been developed, such as the innovative “Power by the Hour” solution for a new set of Argus generators - this means the Rolls-Royce is now responsible for all maintenance and support through-life and the RFA only pay when the ship is in use.

Delivery of Savings

As a publicly funded body the RFA is under increasing pressure to make further efficiency savings, particularly in the face of wider defence commitments. A detailed review of the lessons learnt from the Argus pilot highlighted opportunities to deliver additional savings by accelerating engineering optimisation and supplier development across the wider business. This resulted in identification of a further increase in savings to £123m in the RFA’s 10 year support costs (4 times the original target). At the end of Financial Year 2006/07, a Defence Internal Audit (DIA) Team verified actual savings 21% ahead of target of £10.664m for the first three years. Crucially, the DIA team were confident that a total savings of £123m (25%) over ten years was both achievable and on track. Actual savings achieved during 2007/08 amount to £11.869m providing a four year accumulated total of £22.5m and representing a significant success before the strategy was fully deployed.

Supporting Front-Line Operations Globally

A key aspect of supporting the military is to ensure the ability to maintain vessels on a global basis. Therefore a second pilot was launched in March 2006 for RFA Bayleaf, an Oil Tanker that required a major refit in Singapore. The objective of this pilot was to minimise operational down-time by testing “Global Reach” – in this case, the tanker was re-supplied with fuel during its programme of repair in Singapore and used this to prove the concept.

The 12 month contract valued at £6m included all operational support requirements in Dubai as well as the refit in Singapore. Operational commitments, which are the number one priority for the RFA, could not be affected at any time throughout the refit programme. This non-negotiable requirement presented a finely balanced challenge for the implementation team during intense period of change. Nevertheless, RFA Bayleaf was returned to front-line operational support as planned and delivered savings of £400k. RFA Fort George meanwhile was subject to a UK based work-package testing joint working principles that delivered savings of £2.3m (15%).

Re-engineering the Engineers

The TLS Statement of Technical Requirements (SoTR) had to be developed from scratch for each 16 vessels; this required 1000s of engineering man hours to collate the individual support requirements for the remainder of each ship’s operational life. A task of this scale had never been contemplated before, let alone undertaken. It was led by procurement specialists working with RFA engineers and based on the principles of “Lean Supply”, this also necessitated new contract Terms and Conditions suitable for TLS applications to be created. This involved the implementation of new processes such as Supplier Relationship Management, TLS Performance Management, Benchmarking and Target Cost Incentivisation. A through-life “Should Cost of Ownership by Year” model was developed and constructed by the project team using first principles to ensure that TLS would be affordable and equally important, sustainable over the long-term. The “Should Cost of Ownership by Year” model now holds the TLS cost projections for all RFA vessels, broken down by every applicable “class of work”. It also provides the baseline from which to identify and demonstrate future savings.

Strategic Partnering

The TLS Invitation to Tender (ITT) for all six ship clusters was issued at an Industry Day in August 2007. This was followed in October 2007 with the issue of four Market Facing Category (MFC) ITTs representing over 96% of the RFA’s future requirements. In December 2007, following extensive evaluation and an innovative presentation and scenario process used as part of the selection procedure, two preferred bidders were chosen for the six ship clusters; four MFC providers were progressively down-selected during the first quarter of 2008. In June 2008 the RFA Contracts were finalised and awarded to Falmouth, Trelawny (Dry Dock), Pembroke (Paint) and Nture (Shipyard). A fourth MFC Contract for Specialist Engineering Services is due to be placed at the end of 2008.

Re-aligning the Business to Support TLS

The RFA is now implementing supplier facing organisational changes that incorporate ship cluster and MFC support teams aligned with the new strategy. Following the Argus pilot, RFA resources have been co-located to supplier sites based at Falmouth and Birkenhead to make sure that the TLS is embedded and sustained throughout the supplier community. These changes complement a wider MOD reorganisation to amalgamate “New Build” procurement with existing “In Service Support” and thereby create a holistic whole-life procurement capability under the umbrella of Afloat Support Directorate.

The picture above shows RFA Argus in Falmouth.
Re: Fort Rosalie Refit

The design and installation of new hot and cold water services, ventilation systems and the fitting of fire proof dampers. It will also provide all cabins with ensuite facilities and mess rooms with state of the art dining facilities. Concurrent with the refit package the ship will be receiving a new Maintenance Management System (UMMS) and an upgrade to Navy Star.

I know a lot of you will have fond memories of the old wooden comforts that Fort Rosalie had to offer in abundance. But I’m sure you will materialise like a butterfly emerging from a chrysalis when she sails off into the sunset from the Mersey, more effective and comfortable than ever (just in time for workup at Devonport!).

And it’s not all been work and no play, during this upkeep period, we have been able to forge strong links with Weatherfield School for girls on Wirral and Nautilus House Retirement Home at Wallasey. Ship’s Company have visited both establishments for formal and less formal events. Some of the ship’s officers gave a presentation to year 10 students at Weatherfield School to discuss philosophy and ethics! There has also been a number of social visits to Nautilus House. This has been reciprocated by visits from pupils, teachers and parents from Weatherfield School and staff from Nautilus House to gain an insight into ‘The lifestyle of marmites’. We have also been able to invite our affiliation sea cadets from Fort Grange based in Tamworth, providing them with a rare and opportune moment to observe Fort Rosalie in dry-dock.

TRAINING DOWN UNDER BLACK ROVER

By Cdt (X) Ann Halliwell

Our arrival in the Falkland Islands last week was a crystal clear day with bright sunshine, the views were stunning and playing joyfully amongst the wash from the tug were a pod of dolphins. I thought this was a stroke of good fortune, what on earth are the晶sal stories about? Well, seven weeks down the line I still feel the same. We’ve had some relentless foul weather and problems with transport to what seems the only leisure facility available coupled with a few other little gripes, but on the whole the trip so far has been thoroughly enjoyable. I was told by my Father, a Merchant Seaman himself that seawaring is what you make of it, and I’ve certainly been making the most of my time down here.

The ship has had a busy training programme this week, the RAF’s Search and Rescue Sea King helicopter and Tommo F3’s, RAsing with HMS Liverpool and HMS Clyde, loading cargo from the Single Point Moorings SPMM Gurnes’, anchoring, tank diving and cleaning, the list just goes on. All this is providing an excellent training opportunity for the Cadets onboard for who Captain C Clarke is granting no respite, this really is the perfect environment to be given the responsibility and to take advantage of occasions as they pop up. Only last week, I attended the daily brief at HQ to find that an hour later I was at 10,000ft in a VC10 fuelling tornadoes (which I have to admit is far more impressive than our form of replenishment, I did not let the flight crew believe that for one moment though). We Cadets have navigated our way not only through Black Rover, where we found ourselves undertaking Engine Room watches, down the ballast and fuel tanks, aloft on the RAS gantry, on the flight deck and out on the crash boat but on board local vessels too. We’ve seen departures off the jetty from a different perspective on board the MOD Tug Grimsenstrom, and I have spent a weekend on board the South Georgia Fishery Patrol Vessel MV Pharos.

Despite the demanding programme there is always time for recreation and the ship has built itself quite an impressive football team. Each Sunday there are matches, freestyling tournaments (which have been turned down on the premise of being too small a community.

The time of year has brought us around to the 26th anniversary of the British Task Force landings in San Carlos right the way through to Liberation from the Argentines. These occasions have been rightfully marked and several memorial services were attended as well as two mess dinners.

Wreaths were laid by the Commanding Officer at all three memorial services. San Carlos to mark the landings, Fitzroy the sinking of Sir Galahad and Sir Tristram and at Stanley the Liberation of the Falkland Islands.

The ship has also been busy hosting visitors from the UK. Three appointers from Whole Island came to visit the ship to get a taste first hand of what goes on onboard, and for the ship’s company to gain personal interaction with the appointers and discuss any problems there may be. If the ladies thought they were down here for a holiday then things were soon put into perspective for them. Each day was jammed packed and the ship’s company worked hard to make their stay pleasant, yet realistic of the ship’s daily routine. I personally hosted them for their initial few days, as the ship was still at sea and I had them hiking up Mount Harriet, where we polished the memorial as a sign of respect to those who lost their lives.

Back onboard they got involved in crash boat drills, weapons demonstrations, first aid, ways of working including laundry, amongst a plethora of other tasks they really did have a busy, but hopefully enjoyable time.
Coming out of refit in late 2007 and completing a major restore — in excess of 4,000 loads (2,000 tonnes) of food, ammunition and general stores were handled, Fort Austin began 2008 under the watchful eye of Flag Officer Sea Training (FOST) off the coast of Plymouth. An intensive four-week training period saw the ship and crew put through their paces with a variety of exercises and inspections.

No stone was left unturned; indeed all aspects of the ship were scrutinised, ranging from the ability to cater for 130 people at Action Stations to a crash landing on the flight deck to a major engine-room fire and RAS — replenishment at sea.

The final week, DCT(H) (Directed Continuation Training (High)) concentrated on State One or war fighting training such as action damage and weapon firings. Training culminated with a final “Thursday War” inspection by Flag Officer Sea Training and his Staff. Declared “Satisfactory”, the ship headed for the warmer climes of the Mediterranean and beyond.

A brief sojourn in Crete provided much needed R&R for those heading to the Indian Ocean and the chance for many to explore the island.

Reaching the Indian Ocean provided a variety of challenges, not least the defence of the ship against potential threats. The Straits of Gibraltar provided the first opportunity since training with FOST for the gun crews to close up. 2(O)(X) Deryck Osborne, the Ship’s Point Defence Officer commented that “this provided a much needed opportunity to allow our weapons crews the chance not only to practice with live ammunition, but also to close up under a very real threat”.

Bahrain provided an unscheduled port visit in early April. By sheer luck the weekend in Bahrain coincided with the Bahrain Formula One Grand Prix! Many of the ships’ company took advantage of this and headed to the Sakhir circuit for a day out none will ever forget.

Leaving Bahrain behind and rejoining the Task Group heading east for the shores of India and the beginning of Exercise Konkan. The journey east was uneventful, although a marked change in climactic conditions was noticed by all. 35°C (95°F) and 80% humidity adds an additional challenge to the working day. Anchoring off the port of Mormugao provided a few days to explore Goa. This was the first time in India for many — some headed straight for the beaches with others exploring the markets of Anjuma. Not too many people can boast of a day trip to India!

Hosting a multinational cocktail party during the stay in Goa, the Indian Naval Ship (INS) Mysore represented the might of the Indian Navy. Influenced by former Soviet ship design, the Indian Navy is the region’s major naval power.

Numerous opportunities existed throughout the deployment for personnel to x-pol. An x-pol is essentially the exchange of personnel between vessels, allowing each to experience the ways of the other. HMS Trafalgar provided the first, with the Commanding Officer, Dale Worthington OBE, joining his counterparts for lunch under the Indian Ocean and then 3(O) (LS) Adkins and John Dalton from the STO(N) department ‘winning’ the chance to spend the night onboard.

Lt. Cdr Nilesh Khokle spent a week onboard Fort Austin experiencing just about everything that makes a ship of the RFA ‘tick’. With 2(O)(LS) Hill, the Deputy Logistics Supply Officer, and PTO Andy Waugh taking in the supply ship INS Aditya, numerous comparisons were made.

Offering the same chance the USS Cole, badly damaged in a terrorist attack in Yemen in 2000, drew many visitors from around the task group. On their return everyone spoke of just how moving the memorial to those killed in that attack was.

‘Lusty’ (HMS Illustrious) provided the last chance of the deployment for personnel to transfer – the lucky ones from Fort Austin being the two first-trip deck cadets — Joe Davies and Dean Southall.

The INS Mysore made a reappearance later in the exercise conducting a RAS (Replenishment at Sea) serial, representing the growing relationship between the two navies.

Perhaps the most unusual of the many replenishment serials was the transfer of stores to HMS Trafalgar — the first time many onboard had encountered a RAS with a submarine.

15,056 miles and 59 days later Fort Austin and her crew were once more in the Mediterranean Sea. After the highs of the Indian Ocean, a temperature of 20°C (69°F) seemed positively chilly!

Homeward bound and with many of the crew anticipating their leave with some relish, a brief stop was made in the Sicilian city of Palermo.

Having spent a few days alongside in Glen Mallan in late May, re-stored and with around a 30% change in personnel, a brief passage south followed to provide a training platform for the UK’s Special Forces.

With the AMP behind us, RFA Fort Austin is heading for the South Coast Exercise areas for OP, an RNR exercise and some more time with FOST!

BLUE DAY

RFA PERS OPS staff were invited to wear something blue in return for a donation to the Tom Prince Cancer Trust. So far we have raised over £40.

With many Pompey season tickets holders amongst the staff, it was a chance to put on the team shirts and prepare for the Cup Final ahead — Come on Blue Army!!

VICTORY

Deputy Commander, Military Sealift Command, Rear Admiral Robert Wray, recently made his first official visit to the RFA along with PMI Jim George (MSC), and Chief Officer Carl Woodfield (RFA). Admiral Wray has a keen interest in Admiral Lord Nelson and was in his element onboard HMS Victory. He thoroughly enjoyed his visit and the additional insights that was provided by Victory’s First Lieutenant, John Webb.

MSC and the RFA are similar organizations, though there are some real differences. The common denominator of the two organizations is the objective to provide the right ship, with the right people, on time and on task. The cornerstone of this visit was to set the groundwork for further inter-change with the intention of “benchmarking” our respective organizations. Areas identified so far are Personnel, Maintenance and Repair.

The Admiral visited: RFA HQ, RFA Pers Ops, Phoenix, RFA Lyme Bay and DE and S at Abbey Wood. The visit proved to be very beneficial with the joint undertaking of a broader and closer partnership for the future.
Mounts Bay had left Salvador, Brazil and the rest of the international task group, and was heading home by herself. It took 2 weeks to cover the 4502 nautical miles back to the UK. The Navigators chosen route involved long periods steering the same course and seemed to avoid all the main shipping lanes - we went for days at a time without seeing any other ships. Instead our most common companions were flying fish and seabirds, with occasional visits from dolphins and the odd turtle or two. The normal programme of internal training and exercises continued, including training with charged fire hoses for the Fire and Repair Parties and equipment briefs for the bridge teams. On the 22nd May we crossed the Equator again, heading north and had a small ceremony for those who had joined the ship during our time in Brazil and who had not previously crossed the line. This was followed by a barbecue, and muttering from the old salts “crossing the line going north doesn’t count.” On the way back home we also held a Machinery Space fire exercise, putting all the previous training sections into practice as a whole ships company. The bridge and engine-room teams also conducted Man Overboard drills and Machinery Breakdown drills, running through and practising the procedures should something go wrong.

The day of our return started early, rendezvousing with RFA Gold Rover for Replenishment at Sea, to top up our fuel tanks after another long passage north. After completing the RAS, we arrived in Portland in the evening, glad to be home again. Mounts Bay had less than a week in Portland, and the crew were kept very busy. Aviation fuel was discharged to road tankers, ammunition was landed ashore and new personnel joined. As if this wasn’t enough we also had our International Safety Management (ISM) Code audit - all our routines and paperwork were checked to ensure things were done as they should be. Integrated with the audit were various training sessions for the crew, such as manual handling and risk assessment. Just 5 days after arriving, Mounts Bay sailed again, heading along the coast to Falmouth.

Ships are complicated things and need regular maintenance to keep in top condition - equipment can get worn or damaged, steel rusts and new kit is developed and needs installing. Mounts Bay had been programmed for a CSP - essentially some TLC! Initially the ship went to a normal berth, before shifting round to a dry dock in order for checks to be made on the hull and a fresh coat of paint applied. We spent 10 days sitting on the blocks before floating up, restoring the ship to her natural state once more. Amongst others, Deck and Engine Room department equipment has been serviced, the communicators have had new gear fitted, everything from fresh water tanks to lifeboats has been inspected, and anything that doesn’t move (and a few things that do) has been painted.

Mounts Bay is now in great condition and more capable than before. After a week of tidying up the last few jobs, she sails again to participate in a variety of exercises and port visits.

Daily Orders called it a Beach expedition, and it certainly lived up to expectations. We embarked onto the jambo Gemini via the pilot ladder and made our way around to the jetty to await the coastal patrol boat which was to act as our guide through the many reefs to our destination of Gibbs Cay, which is a small uninhabited island to the east of Grand Turk.

Once the patrol boat arrived and took aboard the local volunteers we set off, following in her wake, getting wet thoroughly from the spray picked up in the strong breeze, but enjoying every minute. Approaching the narrow gap through the reef at boat using his local knowledge as we guide had a word with the patrol boat for home. Dangerous to continue so we turned before it burst into flames. It was through the reef one of our outboard minute. Approaching the narrow gap through the strong breeze, but enjoying every minute from the spray picked up in off, following in her wake, getting wet thoroughly from the spray picked up in the strong breeze, but enjoying every minute.

TURK'S & CAICOS - BEACH EXPEDITION TO GIBBS CAY

Each year, The Isle of Wight stages the “Walk the Wight” sponsored charity walk with all proceeds donated to the Earl Mountbatten Hospice. The walk covers the entire length of the island from Bembridge in the east to Alum Bay near the Needles, - a total distance of some 26.5 miles.

As a proud island native, RFA DILIGENCE’s MEO, Bob Huxtable, has previously participated in the walk, but not this year due to his current appointment in the Gulf. Not deterred by this minor inconvenience, Bob decided the best course of action was to participate in the walk whilst onboard the ship alongside in Bahrain! With 20 laps of the flight deck to the mile, all Bob needed to achieve was a small matter of 530 laps!

Ably assisted by his enthusiastic support party, Bob set off at 0500 to take advantage of the cooler temperatures at the start of the walk, - after all it was only about 30C at that stage! After making his first few laps, Bob took on much needed fuel in the shape of a DIL “full truckers” breakfast before continuing his trek. There was no let up in pace with upper deck temperatures now reaching 43C and the XO doing his best to simulate the rolling hills of IOW by introducing a substantial list!

With constant rehydration and iced cooloed flannels along the way, Bob crossed the finish line at 1230, - a truly astonishing effort in the conditions. Still nursing blisters on his blisters, Bob is delighted to have raised £250 for the Hospice through sponsorship from the ship’s company. Well done indeed!
WA VE KNIGHT
Continuing with Gulf ready tanker duties for the foreseeable future.

WA VE RULER
APT(N) Counter Narcotics operations and other maritime exercises including standing by for disaster relief and the protection of dependant territories in the Caribbean in company of HMS IRON DUKE.

GOLD ROVER
Gone into refit in Birkenhead. Will remain in refit for the foreseeable future.

BLACK ROVER
APT(S) Remains in the South Atlantic in support of HMS LIVERPOOL conducting protection of dependant territories.

BAYLEAF
At the entrance to the Mediterranean, off Gibraltar.

ORANGELEAF
FOS$t tanker duties in September.

FORT VICTORIA
Continues her extended period alongside in Portsmouth Dockyard.

FORT GEORGE
Remains in refit in Birkenhead until the end of October. Then she goes into restoring and work up.

FORT AUSTIN
She will remain UK based in support of wider Seedcorn training activities.

FORT ROSALIE
Still undertaking a £28 million refit at Birkenhead which is still expected to last until November 08.

CARDIGAN BAY
Continuing to undertake operations under Op Telic up NAG supporting NATT.

MOUNTS BAY
Conducting operations in the English Channel.

LYME BAY
Off Portland for trials.

LARGS BAY
Off Portland.

ARGUS
In Falmouth for maintenance period prior to resuming aviation training.

DILIGENCE
Proceeding East through the Mediterranean.

Provided courtesy of The U.K. Hydrographic Office
The Royal Fleet Auxiliary’s Community Website was launched on 25 June 2008 by the Earl of Wessex at Abbeywood. The site has a growing number of registered members; why don’t you become one?

www.rfacom.mod.uk is for RFA personnel, their families and friends and offers a wide range of information on RFA and family matters. Connecting and supporting the RFA community worldwide 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, this internet based Community Support Facility is for everyone within the Royal Fleet Auxiliary community. If you are a serving member of the RFA, a family member or friend this site is for you, linking you with the RFA world.

The RFA Community Website is not intended to replace or duplicate the Deployment News that units currently publish on their respective pages of the Royal Fleet Auxiliary website. www.rfa.mod.uk is aimed at a much wider audience, including the general public, potential recruits and journalists.

The member’s area of the RFA Community Website is open to serving personnel, their families and friends who have registered to use this facility. The members area can only contain information of an unclassified nature forbidding the inclusion of information such as forthcoming port visits and other operational aspects of a ship’s programme. However the area contains a host of RFA relevant information that enables you to keep in touch with the wider RFA Community.

As well as information the members area has a chat room and several discussion forums. With “If in doubt leave it out” policy on sensitive material. These Forums can lift you up as well as leave you lying on the floor with laughter.

To register for an account, you will need a valid email address; the serving persons discharge book, number, full name and date of birth. These details are used to verify every applicant, with approvals processed within 48 hours.

www.rfacom.mod.uk will keep you and your families informed supported and united, so why not give it a go? Add you and your family and friends to the growing member of the RFA Community Website. Keep in touch, share your views and participate in the RFA Community Website popular forums.

Please register for an account today and log in to explore the facilities available. You can e-mail any feedback or suggestions, to Lisa.Barrett676@mod.uk.

WONDERING WHERE THE CREW LISTS ARE?

Log on to www.REACOM.mod.uk to see the lists that have previously been in Gunline, they will be updated monthly so you can find out where your shipmates are.
The Company has recently adopted two RFA ships, the RFA Largs Bay and RFA Cardigan Bay and we proudly state, as a member of the Worshipful Company of Fuellers and Worshipful Company of Carmens as City of London Livery Companies who have adopted RFA ships. We are proud to have among our membership the current RFA Head of service, Commodore Bob Thornton RFA and Captain Bill Hill of the RFA Head of Service designate. There are also many retiring and serving RFA Officers who are both Liverymen and Freeman of the Company.

City of London Livery Companies

The 108 Livery Companies, as of 2008, that make up the Corporation of London, continue to flourish today. The Livery Companies are all based in the City of London, almost all of which are known as the Worshipful Company of - the relevant trade or profession. Some Livery Companies (for example, the Goldsmiths and the Fishmongers) continue to have a regulatory role today and some (for example, the Longbow Makers) have become inoperative except as charitable foundations. All Livery Companies have charitable and educational functions as well as playing an important part in social life and networking in the City of London.

After the Fan Makers were established in 1709, no new companies were formed for over 100 years until the RFA Mariners in 1926. Post-1926 companies are referred to as the Modern Livery Companies of which there are currently 30 who have received their livery from the Corporation of City of London.

Precedence

In 1515, the Court of Aldermen of the City of London settled an order of precedence for the forty-eight Livery Companies in existence, which was based on the Companies’ economic or political power. The first 12 Livery Companies are known as the Great Twelve City Livery Companies.

Governance

Livery Company members generally fall into two categories: freemen and liverymen. One may become a freeman, or acquire the “Freedom of the Company”, part in the life of the Company’s criteria. Traditionally, one may be admitted to the Freedom by “servitude” if one has served as an apprentice in the trade for the requisite number of years, or by purchase (“redemption”). Admission to the Livery is subject to the rules of the individual Company.

The Companies are governed by a Master, Wardens and a Court of Assistants, elected by the Freemen and Liverymen of the Company, who in turn elect the Master and Wardens. The Clerk to the Company shares some characteristics with that of the role of Chief Executive. Freemen generally advance to becoming Liverymen by a vote of the Court of the Company. Historically, only Liverymen had a part in the election of the Lord Mayor of the City of London.

The Honourable Company of Master Mariners

Formed in 1926, the Honourable Company of Master Mariners aims to:

- encourage and maintain a high standard of ability and professional conduct in the officers of the British Merchant Navy,
- promote and maintain in all respects efficient and friendly co-operation between the Merchant Navy and the Royal Navy,
- be available for advice and consultation on all questions concerning or affecting the Merchant Navy, or judicial, commercial, scientific, educational or technical matters relating thereto.

The origin of the Company lies at the Annual Shipmasters’ Dinner held in Liverpool on 2nd March 1921, when Sir Robert Burton-Chadwick suggested that the profession was entitled to form, and was capable of forming, a Guild or Company very much on the lines of the old City of London Livery Companies. His vision was realised on 25th June 1926 with the formation of the Company of Master Mariners.

In March 1928, Edward, Prince of Wales, assumed the office of Master. In June of that year His Majesty King George V bestowed the title of Honourable on the Company - a rare and singular honour for their services to the Nation and Empire at sea during World War 1. The title of Honourable has only ever been bestowed on two other companies; the Honourable East India Company and the Honourable Artillery Company. The Honourable East India Company continues today as a territorial regiment in the British Army, whereas the Honourable East India Company was stripped of its administrative powers over India in 1858 before being dissolved by Act of Parliament in 1874.

The City of London welcomed the new Company with great warmth and in 1932 the Court of Aldermen conferred on the Company the status of Livery and official recognition. It was the first time in over 200 years that the ancient doors of the Guild of London had been opened to a new Company. The Company became 78th in order of precedence in the Livery and is noted as the first “modern” Company and as such is held in high esteem within the City.

Her Majesty the Queen became the Honourable Company’s Patron in 1952. His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh was Master from 1957, and then became Admiral of the Company - a post he holds to this day. His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales was Master from 1988 to 1990 while, most recently, the Princess Royal was Master from 2005 to 2007.

HQS Wellington

It was always the ambition of the founding members of the Company to have a Livery Hall and up to the outbreak of war in 1939 various proposals were examined, including the purchase of the sailing ship Archibald Russell. After the war, it became apparent that the possibility of building a Hall in the City of London had been rendered very remote and when, in 1947, the slop HMS Wellington was made available by the Admiralty, the Company decided to buy her with money subscribed by the Members and convert her to a floating Livery Hall - an appropriate home for a Company of seamen.

Built at Devonport in 1934, HMS Wellington saw service on the New Zealand and China stations before the outbreak of World War 2 during which she served primarily in the North Atlantic on convoy escort duties. During the war, Wellington was fitted with two 4.7 inch and one three inch guns. Additionally, anti-aircraft guns were fitted for self defence. Defence charges for the guns and ammunition were paid by the Company. Wellington served primarily in the North Atlantic on convoy escort duties. She shared in the destruction of the German submarine U559.

In March 1947, the ship was brought to London where she was examined, including the purchase of the ship. The conversion was completed at Devonport in 1956 with substantial funds from the Company. Wellington was named after the Chairville which is a young and forward looking Livery Company enjoying a multi-function role in the City of London, seaports of the United Kingdom and abroad. Membership of the Honourable Company is open to qualified Master Mariners of the British and Commonwealth Merchant Navies and qualified seamen officers of the Royal Navy.

Education.

The Company provides practical support to a number of mariners. Grants from the Company’s Endowment Fund and Charitable Trusts may be available for education purposes provided trust criteria are met. The Company has supported the training of Deck Officers and Masters since it was founded in 1926. The Company is taking the lead in developing programmes to support mid-career mariners and those who wish to broaden their educational base. Initiatives include a MSc in Maritime Operations and Management at City University.

Charities.

The Company manages four “Charities” in Liverpool and needier mariners and their families and the education of those either wishing to make a career at sea or already pursuing a seafaring career.

Adopted Ships by the Honourable Company

The Company has adopted RFAs Largs Bay and Cardigan Bay. The current Master of The Honourable Company of Master Mariners, Captain A.P.M. Davis, and I as Senior Warden, were privileged to be invited to the recent presentation of the Queen’s Colours to the Royal Fleet Auxiliary in RFA Largs Bay at Portsmouth.

We look forward to meeting the Officers and ship’s company of Largs Bay and Cardigan Bay in the near future.

Joining the Honourable Company of Master Mariners

Any qualified RFA or retired Officer holding a STCW II/2 Master Mariner’s qualification or RN equivalent is welcome to apply to join the Honourable Company of Master Mariners as a Freeman. For those Officers not holding the required qualifications, you can still join us as an Associate Member after interview. We also have apprenticeship membership for Cadets/Midshipmen. Further information look up our website at www.hcmn.org.uk.

Captain Malcolm W Parrott

Senior Warden

The Honourable Company of Master Mariners
RFA ASSOCIATION

RFA Reunion 2008

The RFA Reunion 2008, the highlight of the Association Social Calendar, was held this year at the Marriott Hotel Edinburgh on 10th May 2008. The event, hosted by the Scottish and Newcastle Branch, was very well organised and BZs are deserved all round for the organisers and their efforts. A good turnout of the membership ensured a splendid evening.

Highlights of the evening included the proceedings being opened by a piper and concluded with a presentation to Rex Cooper the retiring Chairman of the RFAA and his wife Pat. The main gift was a painting of RFA ROBERT MIDDLETON steaming up the Sound of Mull - Rex's first command in 1973, and a ship for which they both have much affection. The painting was by Rachel Person, a graduate of the Glasgow School of Art. Pat also received a beautiful silver photo frame and a Caithness glass paper weight.

Rex gave his valedictory speech outlining the background of the Association, it's development into the Association we know today and his hopes for the future.

Commodore Bob Thornton also gave his valedictory speech - he is to be relieved later this year by Commodore(Desig) Bill Walworth. His speech highlighted the recent developments in the Fleet, including new ships, new training regimes, new opportunities and a new security of tenure for the RFA and it's people. This is probably the best news that we have heard for a long time.

Numerous photographs were taken and are available to view in the Mortimore Collection at tfslaplymouth.org or on a CD from HQ.

And finally, work is already in progress for next year's Reunion. Liverpool has been selected as the location, given our connections with the port for so many years. Trustee Frank Andrews will be conducting an initial recce to identify a suitable venue, determine costs etc. Details will be announced on the website and by mailshot as soon as they are finalised.

The meeting was opened by the retiring Chairman brought the meeting to a close and the final formalities the proceedings being opened by a piper and concluded with a presentation to Rex Cooper the retiring Chairman of the RFAA and his wife Pat. The main gift was a painting of RFA ROBERT MIDDLETON steaming up the Sound of Mull - Rex's first command in 1973, and a ship for which they both have much affection. The painting was by Rachel Person, a graduate of the Glasgow School of Art. Pat also received a beautiful silver photo frame and a Caithness glass paper weight.

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This year’s AGM was held at 1130 on 5th June at the Thistle Hotel, Newcastle (where it all began so many years ago). Below is just a précis of the proposed minutes and must not be considered the definitive document.

The meeting was opened by the outgoing chairman, Rex Cooper, who welcomed all the attendees. He also welcomed Mrs Lesley Allen (Bellingham Community Trust) who acted as the independent scrutineer of the voting arrangement. He went on to outline the administrative arrangements including the procedure for voting on resolutions and the ballot for the chair. Following a personal statement from the outgoing chairman the meeting moved on to the agenda.

1. The minutes of the last general meeting held on 14th November 2007 were duly passed as a true record of proceedings and the Chairman signed the Minute Book.

2. Following year-end 2007 efforts had been made to simplify the funds and accounts, and the revised layout is now in use for the year 2008. The Chairman also confirmed that the Charity is now registered in Scotland.

3. The Trustees Report and Accounts for 2007 were presented and the chairman guided the members through these documents, whereafter the members were invited to ballot for the resolution to accept them.

4. Mr Peter Nicholls (HMS Nelson) was then balloted to continue as Independent Examiner of Accounts.

5. Following final remarks from the candidates for the post of Chairman of the Association and questions from the members, a ballot was held for the post.

6. The Chairman introduced the trustees standing for re-election and thanked those standing for re-election and thanked those retiring. A ballot was then carried out, following which the Independent Scrutineer retired to conduct the count.

During the count a most agreeable buffet lunch was served and the meeting reconvened for the results - as follows.

Ordinary results, carried:-

Pat Thompson was elected to the Chair of the Association.

Frank Andrews, David Bass, Mike Day, Chris Locke, Alan Roach and Brian Waters were re-elected as Trustees of the Association.

The retiring Chairman warmly thanked Lesley Allen for all her work and care in this matter and welcomed Pat Thompson as the new Chairman of the Association.

And finally there was no further business, and after the final formalities the retiring Chairman brought the meeting to a close thanking everyone for their attendance and contribution. The next meeting will be held in 2009, date and venue to be advised.

AGM 2008

Chairman’s Dit.

Since my election on the 5th June at the AGM it has been like a helter-skelter ride descending into mayhem (and that was on the good days). There has been and still is, so much to learn. I would of course like to thank everybody who supported my candidature for the post and also Rex, who, although he has taken his hand off the tiller after so many years is still keeping a weather eye out of the wheelhouse window.

There is so much to do, but frankly there will always be so much to do so where does one start. Out with the normal routine of Chairmanship and communication with the membership and finding more sources of funding immediately come to mind. I am addressing both these topics, communications by a revamp of the HQ website and finding by polishing up the metaphorical begging bowl.

The change in management has also necessitated change in the contact arrangements. The telephone number remains the same 01434 220000 but added to that is a mobile number 07879 254168 and, especially for the benefit of member's living abroad, a Skype number "Captain.Pat". This latter number seriously cuts the cost of contact from expensive to free via the internet.

Postal arrangements have also changed. Obviously the address, 3-4 Station House Bellingham remains the same but a new PO box is available. See the sidebar for details. The old PO box remains available for a few more months until the rental runs out but will then lapse. I will post the actual date on the website as the date approaches.

Remaining on the topic of communications, please remember that if nobody tells me I will not know. House moves, change of e-mail address, change of telephone numbers and of course when members cross the bar. Please keep in touch so that the pastoral aspects of our Association can be properly addressed.

My thanks go to Mike Day for the County Class Catamaran article and photograph and to George Mortimore for the photographs of the Queen's Colour Ceremony.

Finally, I do apologise for the amateurish standard of my journalism, the whole issue of writing for Gunline has scared the pants off me, so please give me a break this time.

I promise to do better next time.

Pat Thompson
Chairmen's Visit to Buckingham Palace.

On the 19th June outgoing Chairman Rex, accompanied by incoming Chairman Pat Thompson, performed his final act as Chairman with a visit to our Patron His Royal Highness the Earl of Wessex at Buckingham Palace.

Picture the scene. It's a warm, May afternoon, in 1974. In the small office attached to a huge, Georgian stores warehouse in Britain's smallest and, some say, friendliest Royal Dockyard the telephone rings. It's Friday, 3.30 pm and the Senior Storehouse man is looking forward to going home. Chatham is also a slightly old-fashioned dockyard where the personnel turn to at 7.00 am and get breakfast provided by the dockyard. Consequently they go home a little earlier than most people in industry. Reluctantly he picks up the phone. "Hello?" he says, hoping the person calling will appreciate he does not want a long conversation.

"Hi, it's John here, STO(N)'s department, REGENT. How are you, Fred? Looking forward to the weekend?"

"Well, I thought you could just give me a little information. I need to order something for the skipper. I've got a picture of one in use right in front of me. I'll post a copy to you. Perhaps you can help me when we get back. Bye for now, Fred".

Fred was quite relieved - the yard's steam whistle, like a fog horn, had just blown. Time to go home. He was sure he had heard John laughing as he put the phone down. He'd have to wait and see what this photo was all about.

And this is the photo he eventually received.

The County Class Catamaran

In February 1974, RFA RESOURCE was on a very eventful trip covering the east coast of the USA. There was a spectacular visit to New Orleans before the ship, under the command of Captain Don Averill, berthed in San Juan for a few days. It was an alongside berth so that a joy to an ammunition ship's crew.

During the approach to the berth the local pilot lost control of the tugs and the Chief Engineer's accommodation made contact with an USN commando carrier, the INCHON. The Captain took over and put the engines full astern. The Carrier's crew, rushing onto the flightdeck, were covered in black smoke from our funnel as the engineer's tried to re-balance the blowers.

Shortly after we berthed, all the most exciting being alongside, a County Class got permission to berth alongside us. That was innovative in itself. Imagine that happening in Devonport.

We heard TIDEPOOL in VHF conversation with BLAKE and the Flag, not happy about being berthed outside at anchor. The Captain had been talking with the Port Authorities. Apparently there was enough water to berth outboard of us. That meant outboard of the County Class destroyer. We all laughed on RESOURCE. It would never happen. By late afternoon it was happening. And the rest you can see.

And that is how the County Class catamaran came into existence, to keep two large RFAs apart in port.

(c) Mike Day 2008

Extract from his book "British Fleet Auxiliaries" in 5 volumes.

Obituaries

The following members, sadly, have "Crossed the Bar"

Dave Weedall RFA (Rtd) 6 June 2008
Captain (E) Nanabhai (Nana) Karsondas RFA (Rtd) 7 June 2008 aged 81
Commodore Sam Dunlop CBE DSO RFA (Rtd) 17 July 2008 aged 85
Captain Maurice Telfer RFA (Rtd) 17th July 2008 aged 93.
LIFE AT SEA IS NO BARRIER TO LEARNING

When it comes to distance learning The Marine Society’s College of the Sea has often led the way. Its Director of Education for the past two decades, Brian Thomas, reviews the latest initiatives to benefit RFA seafarers.

The Marine Society College of the Sea (MSCoS) has identified a need for a distance taught route for seafarers to top up their HND/FD into a BA/BSc honours degree and a demand amongst senior seafarers to have their Class 1 Certificate of Competency recognised and accredited by a reputable university that offers a swift and seafarer-friendly route to an MA or MSc degree.

So the MSCoS has entered into a partnership with the Institute for Work-Based Learning (IWBL) at Middlesex University to devise such a pathway that can be achieved entirely by means of distance learning. Two ground-breaking programmes are now available.

There’s no requirement for attendance, though there is an opportunity to attend on-campus tutorials for those who wish/can; but these are entirely optional. Internet access isn’t necessary: a work-round is in place whereby resources are made available on regularly updated CD/DVDs.

The financial cost of the programme is very competitive, and is made even more attractive by The Marine Society’s offer of financial assistance to individual UK domiciled seafarers through interest-free loans and a range of scholarships.

There are two main start points annually: September and January; minimum time to complete the programme is just eight months.

These exciting and innovative products have struck a chord with the sector, and already there are several RFA personnel on-programme.

Director of Education at The Marine Society & Sea Cadets Brian Thomas told Gunline: “Key to the success of these initiatives was getting Middlesex University to accredit senior seafarers’ experiential and prior learning.”

Brian continued: “Judged by the volume of expressions of interest being received, and testimony from seafarers, this pace-setting programme fulfils a market niche and has been long awaited by both seafarers and the sector.”

The merit of these programmes to the individual seafarer is self-evident. But the valid point has been made by many in praise of the programmes that they represent a significant step in bestowing upon the seafaring profession a mainstream academic equivalency that has for too long been eluded.

Formally endorsed by the Nautical Institute and supported by the Merchant Navy Training Board, the programmes complement the efforts of the latter and others in enhancing the appeal of seafaring as a career and in turn helping to attract a higher quality of applicant, thereby investing in the future of our seafarers.

More at www.mscos.ac.uk/mdx or email Education@ms-sc.org or phone 020 7654 7050.

GFSE/A LEVEL ACHIEVEMENTS

Congratulations to all Marine Society College of the Sea learners who sat their exams with overwhelming success during summer, amongst whom RFA seafarers are well represented.

Twelve RFA seafarers are currently celebrating their remarkable achievements, with over 93% of Marine Society GCSE learners awarded grades A* to C – this compares to the national average of 65%. And 88% who sat a Level achieved Grade C or above.

The Marine Society College of the Sea has been providing supported self-study at GCSE and A Level for decades; it currently has more than 600 UK seafarer learners at this level.

And because they’re an accredited exam centre The Marine Society can enter and arrange examinations wherever its learners find themselves in the world, including at sea.

RFA Steward Andrew Rawlinson was amongst this summer’s crop of achievers and offers this account of his experience of studying at sea:

Three years ago I enrolled with The Marine Society to take English at GCSE level. Why did I do this? One glance at my woefully lacking CV will suggest an answer.

To begin with I thought why am I bothering? What benefit will this bring? But then I thought of the sense of achievement, higher self-esteem and a better appreciation of the words that make up our English language. A line in my CV now reads “GCSE Grade A”, and I’m proud of that.

I honestly thought that I’d struggle with the work, and the thought of doing this at sea away from a classroom environment would make success at the exam harder. Really though I need not have worried.

The Marine Society put me in touch with my tutor Ruth: a wonderful lady, of whom I can’t speak highly enough. Ruth guided me through the whole course with humour and patience. Towards the end I found that I’d truly enjoyed the work: the improvements that I made from the beginning to the end of the year were quite dramatic, and incredibly satisfying.

Since then I’ve completed a Maths GCSE exam whilst serving onboard RFA Lyme Bay and was pleased with the result. Maths isn’t an easy subject, but thanks again to The Marine Society and my tutor David I can add another new line to my CV.

I’ve found that re-educating myself at the age of 45 has given me a new purpose and a better understanding of myself and the world around us.

I’m currently tackling a computer course ECCLD (European Computer Driving License) and I intend to take a GCSE Science subject next year.

My only regret is that I should have done this years ago, and to anyone who is thinking of studying at sea, I say do it – because you’ll not regret it!”

Find out more at www.mscos.ac.uk or email education@ms-sc.org or phone 020 7654 7050.

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

The Marine Society continues to financially support serving officers and ratings with the RFA.

Administrating the JW Slater Fund on behalf of Nautilus UK several ratings are studying for their OOW certificate. The awards are worth £15,000.

Interest-free loans are available to assist those who wish to study for vocational courses and Worcester Scholarships to assist with higher education programmes.

Already this year several Worcester scholarships have been awarded to RFA personnel. They include assistance to obtain a BSc in Maritime Studies, a BSc in Marine Engineering, and a professional qualification from the Chartered Institute of Personnel & Development.

When awarding scholarships The Marine Society is looking for a carefully considered application with the underpinning aim of furthering a maritime career.

The Marine Society also considers the award of loans which may subsequently be converted into grants. For example, should a seafarer wish to study for a vocationally orientated diploma by distance learning he/she may be offered a loan, but when the course has been successfully completed the loan may be converted into a grant. The aim is to provide additional motivation for a form of study that is often very difficult to follow through.

Contact The Marine Society for more on 020 7654 7000 or logon at www.mscos.ac.uk or email careers@ms-sc.org.

The Marine Society has supported seafarers and champions Britain’s maritime heritage. And with 400 ‘learning ships’ nationwide, the Sea Cadets offering young people a start in life – Navy-style.

Now we need your help to stay afloat in a fast changing world.

By leaving us a legacy you will be our next naval hero!
The first 6 months of 2008 have seen WAVE RULER emerge from refit in Birkenhead and pass through the stringent processes of Fleet Acceptance and subsequent Operational Sea Training before deploying to the familiar beat of Atlantic Patrol (North) and resuming operations in support of the significant UK interests in the Caribbean and Central America.

The period of post-refit regeneration was extremely busy with the usual multitude of conflicting tasking between getting the ship in a fit state to safely conduct routine operations at sea and getting personnel into the training mindset required to successfully deal with the floods and fires of FOST. In between all this, a quick run to Scapa to load 14000 tonnes of oil and a full outfit of ammunition. Amazingly and with full credit to the Ship’s Company, having left Birkenhead in a somewhat debelished state, WAVE RULER presented on time for FOST, was assessed safe at MASC and continued on to an overall “Very Satisfactory” at Final Inspection. One or two minor hiccups en route with the inevitable couple of “rescues” from the wreckers, but WAVE RULER emerged from the ROCW (Refit Operational Co-Ordinator) with full fighting fit and ready for duty just 12 weeks after leaving the hands of North West Ship Repair at Birkenhead.

Prior to her deployment to the Caribbean AOR in support and re-assurance to the UK Overseas Territories, particularly as we approach the height of the hurricane season. Visits and regional engagement to the UK OTs of Anguilla, British Virgin Isles, Cayman Islands, Turks and Caicos along with visits to Curacao, Grenada, Belize and Jamaica have ensured that UK interests are again upheld by WAVE RULER operating as a single unit for much of the time prior to the arrival of HMS IRON DUKE. At each visit, the ship has provided training for local fire services, coastguard or police marine units, search and rescue organisations and has engaged with local disaster management agencies. On completion of the seminar, the ship completed a circum-navigation of the island with the delegates embarked in order to view the volcanic destruction from the sea.

Of course, the ship’s company has also enthusiastically conducted beach surveys and offshore/littoral reconnaissance on each of the islands. Unfortunately, the West Indies sporting tour has run into some difficulty. The Anguillan football team (who play Austria later this year) narrowly lost(!) defeated WAVE RULER with RFA (and USCG) guile and cunning no match for youth and talent. After a bright start, the cricketers are finding life in the Caribbean particularly challenging – as the islands become embarrassingly smaller, the defeats seem to become embarrassingly bigger.

Secondary tasking revolves around Counter Narcoterrorism operations in support of UK and US Law Enforcement Agencies to restrict the flow of illegal narcotics into Europe and the USA. Yet again WAVE RULER found herself at the sharp end of this business, jousting with drug smuggling boats on an almost daily basis. Whilst arrests have not as yet been achieved, disruption to the drug-traffickers trade has been widespread. With our embarked US Coast Guard Law Enforcement detachment, WAVE RULER remains standing firm as a force for good.

The new ‘kid on the block’ for the AGRT role is the former British FOST Support Ships. The new class have been designated the FOST Standing Support Ships (FOSS). Committed to the Robot, the AGRT role is a further tasking role and is currently managed by the UK’s Joint Operations Centre (JOC) in Portsmouth. The FOST Standing Support Ships (FOSS) are the next step in the evolution of the fleet’s electronic warfare. The new ships have been designed to provide a flexible and adaptable platform to support a wide range of tasks, including operations in the Western Mediterranean, the Indian Ocean, and the Gulf of Aden.

The FOST Standing Support Ships (FOSS) are equipped with the latest technology and are designed to operate in a variety of conditions, including high seas and extreme weather. They are equipped with state-of-the-art electronic warfare systems, including radar and electronic intelligence (ELINT) systems, which allow them to detect and track enemy vessels with a high degree of accuracy.

The FOST Standing Support Ships (FOSS) are also equipped with a range of other systems, including communication systems, which allow them to communicate with other ships in the fleet, as well as with shore-based command centers. They are also equipped with a range of defensive systems, including anti-aircraft and anti-ship missiles, to protect them from enemy attacks.

The FOST Standing Support Ships (FOSS) are planned to be in service for a period of 25 years, and they are expected to have a major impact on the security of the UK and its allies in the regions in which they operate. They will provide a strong and effective presence in the Gulf of Aden, the Indian Ocean, and the Mediterranean, and they will help to ensure the security and stability of these regions.

The FOST Standing Support Ships (FOSS) are a testament to the commitment of the UK and its allies to protect the security of the regions in which they operate. They are a key component of the UK’s global security strategy, and they will play a vital role in maintaining the security and stability of the regions in which they operate.

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LARGS BAY SHUTTLE LAUNCH – TECHNICAL TEAM OUTING

Once RFA LARGS BAY’s System and Marine engineers found out that the latest space shuttle was to be launched from Cape Canaveral whilst the ship was in Mayport it was an opportunity not to be missed. Not only for the launch but for the many retail opportunities that such a trip presents.

**Mission Statement:**
To be able to say that we had ‘BEEN THERE, DONE THAT, GOT LOADS OF T-SHIRTS’ (and other associated commercial items of tat)

**Mission Log**

- **Date:** PM Thursday 28th May
  - **Location:** Mayport Naval Station Golf Club
  - **Remarks:** Planning meeting convened and decides that Technical Team outing is essential to ongoing team effectiveness. A pitch of beer seals the deal to organise an expedition 200 miles south to witness the Space Shuttle Launch.

- **Date:** Friday 29th May
  - **Location:** RFA LARGS BAY to Cape Canaveral
  - **Remarks:** Responsible personnel within the technical branch are identified as designated drivers and hire cars booked. On arrival of cars, function test and testing of gear carried out prior to departure at O’crack sparrow next day.

- **Date:** Saturday 30th May
  - **Location:** RFA LARGS BAY to Cape Canaveral
  - **Remarks:** Mission leader Richard Maddock (MEO) gathers gallant explorers for pre-departure brief. Snacks, cameras, sunscreen and deckchairs checked and loaded into vehicles.

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**Team Members:**
- **Mission Controller:** C/O(E) Richard Maddock
- **Delivery Vehicle 1 Pilot:** 1/O(E) Richard Johnson
- **Support Team:** 3/O(E) Colin Parnell, MM2 Chris Ballard, MM2 Jim Clark

**Mission Accomplished:**
- 0730: All gear tested, radio checks designated drivers and hire cars booked. On arrival of cars, function test and testing of gear carried out prior to departure at O’crack sparrow next day.
- 0915: All gear tested, radio checks complete team gets underway.
- 1215: Arrival Cape Canaveral and recce of area to find suitable viewing area. After many stops and a thwarted attempt to get into Kennedy Space Centre using Military ID the gallant team discover a large NASA camping area by the coast, overlooking the launch site.
- 1345: Set-up camp to await launch time. Compulsory visit to gift shop to buy Launch memorabilia. We also had the added bonus of seeing Manatees in their natural habitat.
- 1702: THE LAUNCH – with cameras at the ready our intrepid team watch the launch from only approximately 4 miles away. It was an impressive sight as the shuttle left the pad and streaked into the sky with an unexpected eerie silence until a few seconds later we were hit by the sonic boom and the roar of the powerful engines.
- 2006: After surviving some horrendous traffic congestion our team finally travel the 10 miles to their destination – HOOTERS. After being fed and watered it was back on the road for the long journey home.
- 0310: We arrived tired but fulfilled that we had witnessed one of those once in a lifetime experiences.