

## **BOB BAXTER'S STORY**



Bob Baxter during National Service, 1951

As with various aspects of my life, this chapter relates to my time at HMS Flying Fox. I joined HMS Flying Fox originally in March of 1950. Previously I had spent three years in the Sea Cadets at the TS Adventure on the Counterslip where I had obtained the giddy heights of Petty Officer, then I went to the Flying Fox where I was signed on as a boy seaman. This was in the March and in April they had over the Easter holiday, the RNVR boxing tournament. This consisted of members of all 12 Divisions including Northern Ireland coming to Bristol for the weekend of Easter and they rigged up a full sized Boxing Ring in the Signal School.

We were there lined up for a long weekend, working as part of our requirement for drills at weekends and for my first job I was allocated to the Station Patrol because in 1950, people were coming in by train and only by train from such places as Scotland, Humber and London etc. We were formed into a patrol, given Watch Coats reaching down to the floor and arm bands saying MP in blue on white. We were put in the charge of a Petty Officer called James John Seymour Sebastian Glover, as we came to know him. Jim had served during the War as a seaman and had been to sea since in the Mickey Minesweeper as Coxswain. He was a very experienced man and he looked as though he was a jovial countryman, always with a smile, not a sneer, a smile on his face and it seemed as if nothing fazed Jim, and indeed it didn't. You will find later on when Bill Haynes tells the tale of the Bullocks in Vigo that Jim was a crafty old villain as well. However, it was a good way of starting because he was in charge of this patrol and we had a 5 tonner I believe it was because in those days they wouldn't lay on a coach, and off we went to the station, on the Thursday I guess it was, to meet all these people. At this distance I just cannot recall where they were put up at the Flying Fox nor how the victualling was done, it must have been quite a mammoth task, but we did get to watch all the boxing. There was one chap I think from Bristol who did quite well, known as Piggy Fry, but that is in the dim dark past and I have no real detailed memory of the time.

Again during the summer it was a matter of going to drills, for which I was paid. I was still only 17 but the junior rates mess served beer and they didn't differentiate between

boy seaman and ordinary seaman, so I guess that it was a useful place to go, without having to be challenged on an age basis. Access to the Flying Fox was very simple, I could cross the ferry and catch a bus home or walk, or indeed go on my bicycle. No great memories about summer at the Fox. I was busily seeing Julia at long distance and various other young ladies, dancing every Saturday and generally leading a very full and active life. The whole purpose of joining the Flying Fox was to get in the Navy for my National Service, in those days the Navy were taking 2000 men a year out of a total of 200,000 who were called up. I don't know what the ratio between the Army and the RAF, but that was it, so the Navy had its pick of what it wanted.

Now the only real way to get in was to have some contact or association with the Navy, I had worked it that out because my Father was a Dem's Gunner during the War and invalided out, that would be one step, two steps would be I had served three years in the Sea Cadets, and attained the rank of Petty Officer, in taking those courses I had been away to Naval establishments. The final thing was to get into the RNVR, because that was simply the way in. However, in November I found myself called up with many other people I knew, and we all ended up in Great George Street, in the red bricked building. I had a medical when I joined the Flying Fox and thought nothing would be forthcoming. On this day I expected to pass and go away in December to do my two years. So imagine my total surprise and upset when the Chief called me over and looked at the papers and said "Right Lad you are going in the Army as a Cook", your Medical Grade is C3. I protested and said I cannot be Chief, as I have had a medical for the RNVR, that doesn't matter he said, you have in-growing toe nails, and the Navy won't take you and that is it. Are you quite sure there is no appeal Chief. Look Son, there is absolutely no appeal, we only want 2,000 we have 200,000 to choose from we can't be fussed. "So can I appeal, can I go for a deferment? No you cannot it is not available to you, there is nothing else you just have to put up with it, it's the rub of the green and hard luck, next please". Well I went back to the office that afternoon, and I was in a very dismal state, curiously enough I had seen several of my contemporaries in tears after the Medical because they had been turned down, in fact they were not acceptable for National Service of any kind. However, I had to face the prospect of 2 years as an Army cook and I really did not want to do that, but there was nothing I could do as the Chief said.

I go back to the office and I am called up by a junior partner Derek Burston, and given some task to do for him. He said "What's up Robert, you are looking a trifle downcast?" I explained what had happened, and he said nothing other than "Just give me your chit," so I gave him my calling up card which had been marked and he said, ok I will be in touch". Half an hour later I was asked to go and see him again, he gave me back my chit and said "It's okay you have got your 6 months deferment, just go and get those toenails done". What I had forgotten completely in my anguish was that Derek was the Chairman of the Deferment Tribunal. I think that was when I first began to realise that it is not what you know in this world it is who you know.

In due course I went off to the Doctors and had these toenails removed an incredibly painful business and then joined the Navy in May. Having passed the medical since I gather the medical I had had in November was simply pulled out and wasn't taken into

account at all. So much for the power of the Tribunal Chairman as I was to find myself in later years when I became one.

I am talking here about the Flying Fox and there was another chap who joined the Navy with me at that time on May the 14<sup>th</sup> 1951 called Brian Greening, his initials were Brian Arthur Greening, and he was always known as "Baggy". His Mother and Father were separated I think, they lived somewhere in the Chessels and I had known him quite well in the Sea Cadets. He also joined the RNVR. We went through training together got split up in the Royal Naval Barracks in Plymouth when we were in the line and the drafting jaunty simply cut us up into bits.

As I have recorded elsewhere, I was told to exchange places with the man next door because he was slightly taller than me and he went off to Korea and was killed in an attack on the ship. Brian Greening went off to a destroyer where he, for whatever reason, became in charge of a paint locker, and a year after his National Service was completed he died of leukaemia. That was in the days when all paint had huge amount of lead in it.

However, finishing my National Service I went back to the Flying Fox. It is detailed in there in my papers, when I left the Navy and when I joined the Flying Fox again. It was quite a decision to re-join the Flying Fox because one had the alternative of going on to a Z Reserve which meant, three weeks training for three years and you were finished but the three weeks training was at the discretion of the Admiralty and they would send you where they wanted. The alternative was to go back to the Fox for 5 years where there would be Thursday night drills. There would be a bounty if you carried out the drills and there were weekends at sea plus a fortnight at sea on the Minesweeper. Now it was a requirement in those days that employers had to let you go for the fourteen days annual training in addition to your holiday, and weighing all these things up it was clear which way I was going. I went back and signed on.

I think the first thing I did, (again looking at my papers I can verify that) I went off on a course to become a Leading Hand, that meant going back to Victoria Barracks again for a fortnights annual training in probably 1954. I found myself then in 1955, going off on HMS Venturer to Benodet which is where we went for the Banyan Run at the end of the working ten days.

I think I can tell the story about Benodet while my lunch is cooking in the microwave. Benodet In those days was very much simpler than it is now, when it is a very up-market seaside resort, and an ice cream will cost you £20.00. We went into Benodet and there were a lot of small buoys and a surprising number of yachts at anchor, especially as this is only 5 years after the end of the War. In the middle of the harbour there, it wasn't a harbour, it was just an estuary with was a great big circular buoy, which had been used for tying up the E-Boats during the War. The Captain, who was called Roberts, was RN, because in those days they wouldn't let RNVR drivers away with the Venturer on their own, decided that, as CO to the forecandle I would be a buoy jumper, because didn't want the bother to set the motor boat over the side until after we

were tied to the buoy. The Danforth anchor was dropped two or three feet so that it was ready for slipping in an emergency, and the idea was that I climbed over the bow held onto the anchor and dropped onto the buoy which went very well, because Roberts was a very good ship handler. As he backed off he nudged the buoy and I found myself flat out on it grabbing on the rail that went around it but I managed to survive that and picked up the wire strop and handed it back up and all was well. We then put the motor boat down and started running it, again I was a Killick, so that was me and I had a chap called Hugh Levers who was I think an Assistant at the Veterinary School down at Langford, and he would regale us with various tales. However that is another matter. He was a Killik as well and we had both done the Killick's Course together at Victoria Barracks.

The boat is over the side and the first thing is we see a tanker, a quite small coastal tanker, pull in, drop anchor and we see the signal from this tanker, which said do you have any bread on board?. We had bread because we baked our own and they were offering to exchange wine for bread. We realised this was a wine tanker with a quarter of a million gallons on board, so off we went. That was when I learned that things could disappear quite easily, we came back with a cargo of wine and a surprising amount of it found its way forward and not in the care of the Coxswain, who was Colin Wren.

That was the start, then it was a question of taking the Skipper and one of the other Officers ashore so they could pay their respects to the local mayor and dignitaries, and at the same time they would go and offer to have a children's party on board which was always a good way of getting the good will of the locals, and this particular crowd was to come from an orphanage run by nuns. The next day I was to be duty with Levers and we started out by going ashore to pick up all the children and the nuns, which was quite a caper. You can imagine these kids running amok on the Venturer.

Now apart from Staffy Roberts who was RN, the cook was RN as well, a chap called Coffee, a young man; it was his 21<sup>st</sup> birthday that day. Now when Coffee had joined he was not at all enamoured of having to spend a fortnight cooking for a crowd of old has-beens or ne'er-do-wells, as he put it, but people like Colin Wren and some of the guys from the engine room who served in the War soon put him in his place, and on his birthday they got him stoned out of his mind on rum. So much so that he had to be put in the Coxswain's caboose out of the way of the children's party. The Coxswain's caboose was in fact a cabin, yes it had a door and small table, two bunks, one for him and one for the Chief ERA, and Coffee was virtually tied into the lower bunk so that he couldn't run amok. The door was left open and children are running riot around the place and the nuns are trying to keep them in order, and we have rigged up slides and all sorts of things for them. All of a sudden there is this almighty scream, and it turned out to be Coffee who had woken up and had seen a picture of a nun framed (she had just pulled back the curtain to look) in the doorway. He thought he had died and gone to Heaven. We had a hell of a job convincing him that he hadn't. We ended up getting all the kids off and then it came to the cocktail party.

We had rigged an awning on the forecastle. The Navy were very good at this kind of thing, there were canapés and there was booze, lots of booze, and Levers and I were detailed to go off and pick up the Mayor and Deputy Mayor and all the local dignitaries and their wives. Now Colin Wren was quite wise in these matters having been in during the War and been at the Flying Fox ever since, he said "Look Bob, just do not let the men take charge", "they will try and help the women up and down, keep them on the jetty until you have got the women in the boat. Make them sit down and then let the blokes come down one by one. When you get to the ship make the men go up the ladder one by one, with the women sitting down, otherwise they will tip the boat up. You will find the women won't mind being helped up the side by a young Jack Tar." Now Colin was too right about that. Then 2 hours later we had to take them ashore again, the men having been sort of got in line at the beginning when we took them out, they did the same thing when we took them back and the women of course were getting rather more thrills than they should have done on the way back.

However, ultimately we got them all ashore and the Mayor comes up to me and shakes my hand and the deputy Mayor goes up to Hugh Levers and shakes his hand and we found that we had a 10 franc note neatly folded in each of our hands, it was absolutely great. But the day was not finished yet, we had to bring off the Liberty men and then around about midnight, we shut it down, took the boat astern, tied it on the painter and went up to the gangway sentry and told him to keep an eye on it, and then we heard an almighty splash. From the forecastle, we could see Colin Wren who has dived off the forecastle naked, shouting out he is swimming home for England. Well, I was the Duty Boy so I had to do something about it. Got the Quartermaster with a torch to keep the light shining on Colin, because all around him were these little buoys where yachts did come and anchor and that looked just like another head. So I went down aft, having knocked up the stoker to start the engine hauled the boat in on the painter and decided to go down on the painter, and of course it parted and I went in all standing, that delayed matters a minute, but we got underway, and went back and ultimately caught up with Colin, got him on board, and took him and set a watch on him so he couldn't do it again.

Then I realised my watch had stopped and we are now in September of 1955 and this had been a wedding present from my wife the previous July, so the next day was chaos. I had to go ashore and find a watchmaker, and would you believe it there was one in this tiny place of Benodet, and he repaired the watch for about 7 francs, and Maggie never knew, end of that.

You would have thought that that was enough shenanigans in Benodet at that time, but the next day I was free and so with others I went ashore, very quickly exhausted the delights of Benodet, having found the watchmaker and got my watch repair underway, then went into the main square and there was a bus. It was labelled it was going to a place called "Quimper" which is further up the river, so we decided we would give it a try climbed aboard and paid whatever it was, a minuscule amount, and we sat there for half an hour waiting to go. All life was around us, as people came along on their bikes, they paid their fare and the bike was put on top of the bus, then along came a chap with a

trailer, which had pigs in it, The top of the trailer was covered with a net, and this trailer was hooked onto the back of the bus, tying it surely there, so it was obviously a regular thing. Then the driver got in started the engine, was about to pull away when he saw somebody he didn't like in the square so he got out and they ended up having a fist fight. The driver got back in with blood running down from a cut on his head, and simply drove off. We got to Quimper which is a fairly downtrodden French town and there was nothing, absolutely nothing there, to see apart from the women on the banks of the river washing the clothes which seemed to us fairly primitive, but remember we were using boilers in the back of the back kitchen, and things of that order.

We were getting fairly hungry and so we managed to find a restaurant, well no, in those days you must remember this was only the second time I had been ashore in France, and I knew absolutely nothing of the nuances between a restaurant and a bar. So I think it must have been a bar we ambled into and asked for something to eat. So somehow they made it clear to us that they could pitch up with omelette and chips or frits. I'm not sure whether moules came into it or not, but anyway, we sat and we waited and we waited and in the end one of us got up and went out into the kitchen and found they were still sat around peeling the spuds. Since we were all hungry we all went out and finished off peeling the spuds. The atmosphere changed, it was fascinating. Then in due course, we sat around the table laid up with the wine etc., and they brought in on a silver salver, could have been silver, could have been whatever, but a three foot long omelette beautifully rolled together with mounds and mounds of frites, and they cut this into slices and passed it round. It was absolutely delicious, none of us had ever seen this done and I don't think I have ever seen it since in a restaurant, it was state of the art stuff, we paid our bill which wasn't that much even for us poor lads, and off we went back on the bus to Benodet.

We were on 2359 leave so that was fine and there was a dance going on in Benodet, so we said we would go, but one of our number, Ken Thomas who was a Leading Electrician, decided he wanted to try out a scooter which was a Vespa, he, God alone knows how, he managed to blag it and got it on rental from whoever was renting them out there. He was giving rides around the square etc., to all of us so I hop aboard and Ken who was by this time less than sober, drove into the middle of the dance floor scattering dancers all over the place. I got out of there fairly quickly and ended up in a night club.

Again, strange, this in the days when people going abroad could only take £25.00 with them and in this night club, there was a local solicitor known to me and I to him, with his family and his daughters and I reckon his bar bill was more than the £25.00, he was allowed to take. Chatting away it transpired he had a yacht moored up to one of the buoys and that is where I first became aware of the old sovereign in the keel trick. But that is another story.

We get back ultimately late on and the next morning before we sailed I am on the forecastle with Staffy who gave me a quiet reprimand about my activities on the dance floor which I took in good part. It was quite an adventure in those days for a young man. I had only been ashore once before in France and that was on the *Indefatigable*

when we were all in training and the *Indefat* went to Le Harve We pulled in alongside the Gare Maritime and were tied up ahead of, it could have been the *Oriana* or it could have been one of the big liners at the time. They laid on a dance for us, that was for the ships company and of course that included about 500 trainees as well, the whole of the platform, the Gare Maritime, was one great big French Tricolour and then a train came in on the other side, and as the Tricolour came down, out of this train got hundreds of young women, God alone knows how they arranged this, but a good time was had by all.

Next day we were taken ashore at least the trainees were, and we were taken to what was the local equivalent of the YMCA for lunch, and I can see it as clearly as that, relatively small glasses all around but bottles and bottles of wine and everybody was talking about this Red Biddy you know if you do drink too much of it next day you have a drink of water and you are gone again” of course all of these apocryphal tales came out but we enjoyed ourselves very simply, and it was my first experience of being in France. As I say Benodet was the second.

My recollections are awry, I had been to France again before 1955, that was in 1954 in April, having come back to the Fox in 1953, in 1954, April the Mine Sweeper for whatever reason went to Rouen up the Seine and down again probably from Portsmouth I should imagine now, I remember it because I was now Killick and I spent quite a lot of time on the wheel. After *Illustrious*, it was no difficulty for me being on the wheel in a fast flowing river like the Seine and I remember that so it is quite fitting that now, what was that 1953, 1954, it is now 2017 and I am going back to Rouen on a ship a big ship up the river fascinating, I bet they won't let me steer it.

There were other memorable trips over the years and I think I will come back to them one by one gradually, but maybe I will put on record now the most unusual annual training that I ever had. What had happened, was that in 1965, I didn't go for annual training, because I was away at Law School. 1966, I found myself in a plaster jacket for 3 months because of problems with a disc so I didn't do any sea training then. 1967 I did Rockaul, when we flew out, exercise and in the Med and came back via Lisbon, Frank Williams in command.

1968, my back was playing up and it was clear that the end was near but I still needed to do my annual training. Now due to the good offices of Paddy Fawcett the Chief Writer and Bunny Austin who had been Alan Dean's successor as PO Jack Dusty, I managed to get assigned to go to Culdrose because by this time Bunny Austin had been commissioned he was now Lieutenant Supply at Culdrose. It was the end of the summer and Maggie and I decided that she should come to stay down there with the children and we would invite her Mother and Father to come with us so we had a babysitter. The only accommodation we could get was a small cottage where I think there was one double bedroom for the old folks a single bedroom for Maggie, and the two children slept on the landing, or in the lounge I think in pull out beds because at that time they were quite young. What was this it would be 1968, so that Gill is 7 around about that time. Anyway, I remember the car we had was Smokey Joe the big Rover

because I was now a Partner in the firm and the only downside was I had to take my annual training as part of my annual leave as a Partner instead of in addition to my annual leave, but that didn't really matter.

Off we went, the idea was that I would be victualled in because there was no room in the cottage and I didn't really want to do the commute from Mullion which is where the cottage was up to Culdrose in the mornings and that was agreed. Maggie and I went out every night and enjoyed ourselves, I dropped her off at the cottage and went back to the ship.

Ostensibly I was there for 2 weeks; it was very comfortable Chief Petty Officer's cabin en-suite, single occupant, the Chief and Petty Officer's mess was very comfortable and the food was very good. The rationale behind my annual training there was that Bunny Austin wanted an audit carried out of the ships boats. Now it may sound odd to anyone but Culdrose was like a small town and its recreational facilities were amazing. Over in Falmouth they had this Marina which was full up with various boats they had for their sailing club and I went there, picked up by the relevant chap and checked it through and did all the inventories etc., they had some power boats there which I looked at, sorted out and checked and I saw there was a 42 foot cutter with Kitchener Gear as it's called. So I said that I would like to rent it for the Saturday because I was technically a member of the ships company for a fortnight. Ah well he says if you can 'ave that 'un – I will have to check thee out. I said what do you mean check me out? Well, he said that Kitchener Gear you know terrible is a terrible thing, I don't know anybody who can work it properly, but I will give you a check round. I didn't tell him that for the previous two years I had been instructing on how to run this thing up and down the harbour in Bristol where the routine was, you fell in, dismissed, got aboard the Cutter with the Stoker and the trainees, took it all the way up to the Ostrich had a pint, came back had a pint, stand easy, back to the Ostrich, and so on. But yes, I could cope with this thing. In fact I first encountered them in the days of the Indefatigable when you got Duty Boats crew. There was no difficulty in checking it out and taught him a thing or two about it as well.

So I booked it for the Saturday. We had finished this by the Tuesday night and on the Wednesday morning I am in the Mess at Stand Easy, I had been to see the Chief Writer who was technically in charge of me, he said "Bugger Off" I've got nothing for you. The Jaunty, that is the Master at Arms came up and sat down and said Chief I understand that you are a Solicitor in civilian life. I said that is true I am, why. Well do you do prosecutions? I said yes, occasionally. Do you defend people? I said regularly, for the last two years in the Magistrates Court, Criminal, Matrimonial, Motoring you name it, I've done it. Coroners Courts, County Courts? Yes, why? Well are you familiar with the fact that nowadays service men can ask for a civilian solicitor to represent them before the Captains Table? Yes, I am fully familiar with that. Are you also familiar with the fact that they can insist on being tried ashore in a civilian court? Yes, I am aware of that. Why?

Well we have a problem. Yes. There is a chap who was picked up by the patrol last night. A landlady rang in and said he was causing trouble; in fact he had hit her. So the patrol goes along finds he is being restrained by half a dozen of the regulars and the



landlady has got a bruise; he is fighting drunk. So they bring him in and he sobers up. This morning he decides he wants to have civilian representation and he wants it in the magistrate's court.

Now you can understand he says that the Captain is not best pleased about this and when somebody realised that you were here we thought perhaps you would care to represent him and advise him. Can you do that? Well yes of course, it is what I do every day. It wasn't what I expected to do here but yes of course, I've got nothing better to do I will be quite happy to do that. There is unfortunately one other thing, says the Jaunty, he has already been assigned a Lieutenant Helicopter Pilot as his friend who is supposed to speak with him or for him at the Captains Table, do you have any objection to him sitting in. None whatsoever because he can get all the things done that I will need such as an office and a telephone and the other bits and pieces.

When do you want me to see him? Can you do it now? Yes of course, So the young Lieutenant is summoned and fixes up a room and a telephone and this chap comes in and he is an Aircraft Handler and he has done 7 years, he's just signed on for 5 and he went out celebrating and he is like just a stropky stoker. He comes in and immediately starts jumping up and down saying you told me I was going to see a Solicitor I am not going to talk to any old Chief Petty Officer. It was explained that I was a Solicitor in civilian life and that I was here on annual training and therefore I was available. I don't believe that you are a Solicitor. I ultimately convinced him by producing my Law Society Wine Club card, I think and so he sat down.

I said what is it you want? I want to be represented by a solicitor I don't want to go before the Captain, I want to go before a civilian court as is my right. Yes that is your right. Now let's examine what will happen to you if you go before the Captain. I don't want that, I said I know but we have to have a starting point. I have obviously read the patrol's report and I can ask you a few questions about it. It is no use asking me questions I was drunk I do not remember anything. Thank you. In which case I will start by telling you what will happen to you if go before the Captain. You will get 14 days Number 11s and 14 days scale which is stoppage of pay and stoppage of leave. And since you are on Number 11s anyway you wouldn't get any leave. It will simply be a stoppage of pay which at your rate would amount to about £350.00. Agreed, Yes, but I... I know what you want, so let's now examine that shall we.

Because the Landlady did not ring the police she rang the Patrol then the Police will not want to know. The Landlady will not want to know the police because if you look at the timing of the call out by the Patrol it looks suspiciously like drinking after hours and that is not something she would want. So therefore I will have to go and see her and persuade her to go and talk to the Local Licensed Victuallers' Association. What are they? I said they are an Association of Publicans and they will have a solicitor who specialises in booze related incidents. He will then be very happy to prepare a private prosecution because he will be being paid by the Association. She will be pissed off because she has to go and talk to him and she has to give statements and she has to appear in Court. So therefore she will not be on your side. Nor will the half a dozen

witnesses which will be called. What do you mean witnesses? I said let me tell you what happened shall I? The woman called closing time. You had been in there quietly drinking all night, you are stoned. She comes out from behind the bar collecting glasses and leans across you to pick up glasses and you pat her backside or worse. She then stands up and slaps your face, after which you in your drunken stupid state, hit her on the jaw. I don't remember I was drunk. Yes I know you were drunk, but that is what they will say happened, because she has a bruise on her jaw. That is it.

Now the Licensed Victuallers' Association man will advise her to bring a private prosecution against you and they will charge you with 1. Common Assault. 2. Assault causing Actual Bodily Harm. 3 Affray. What's that? I said that is when the half a dozen regulars moved in to stop you hitting her again. Then you struggled and then you fought and then there will be criminal damage. What do you mean criminal damage? Well that's about the broken tables and chairs all the glasses and the beer that got spilt and I am sure they ripped the carpet. I don't remember I was drunk. I know you were drunk. But there are six people at least who will come and testify to that and so will the Landlady. And if I am to defend you in the court, what can I say except that you were drunk. You were out of your mind you can't remember anything. So you will be found guilty. Well okay I will be found guilty. But what will be the fine. I said about the same as you would lose in pay with the Captain. Well let's go down that road that's what I want, my independence. I said I see.

Now the problem is as you leave the Court the Solicitor for the Licensed Victuallers' Association will hand you a piece of paper on which you like an innocent abroad will take you will open it up and you will find it is a Writ issued in the local County Court it is claiming (A) For the Criminal Damage to the Chairs, Tables, Beer, Carpet, amounting to I say perhaps £500, maybe £1,000. There will be the Landlady claiming that she now has PTSD, and she is afraid to come from behind the bar any more so she has to employ someone to do that, which over a period of time is quite expensive. She will also then tell you that because of the way you hit her on the jaw her dentist has informed her that she has to engage the services of what they call a Cranial Sacral Specialist to realign her jaw. Now all of these things will amount to probably about £5,000. You cannot be serious? Yes I am because that is the limit in a County Court. So it will be right up to the limit. I don't have that money. Well maybe you don't but in civil claims there is a much lower balance of proof than in a criminal case. Now in fact because you have been found guilty in a criminal court of all these offences then it would be a slam dunk as far as she is concerned. Judgement will be given for her. I don't really care about that he says, I have no money, I signed on and I spent all my signing on pay I have been here there and everywhere and so it doesn't matter to me. They can get what Judgement they like. Well let me tell you, have you ever heard of An Attachment of Earnings Order? What's that? Well that means that the Judge can grant an Attachment of Earnings Order because although you are in the Navy, you are not necessarily at Culdrose, and they can't get you to make you pay the money so therefore this Attachment of Earnings Order will be served on the Chief Writer here and it will follow you throughout your career in the Navy so that they will take a half of your pay every

pay day until such time as the money has been repaid. Do you understand? Yes I do. Will you represent me before the Captain please?

Of course I did and the eyebrow was raised when I was there, although he had been briefed and what do you have to say then Chief? Well sir, very simple, Bloggs looked upon the wine when it was red and he is willing to take the consequences. 14 days Number 11s, 14 days scale. Case dismissed.

That was that and you would think it was the end of the whole thing as far as I was concerned. Perhaps it wasn't in fact because by the time I got back to the Mess there was a call in for me to ring the Flying Commander which I did and he asked if I would like to go flying that afternoon. I went on a test flight in a Wasp I think it was for a couple of hours. Back in the Mess and the Chief Writer, says to me do you do Conveyancing as well? I said yes, that is what I do mainly, why? He says there is a great big pile of stuff there. What has happened is that the Navy are desperate to get Petty Officers who have come to the end of their 7 to sign on and what is happening is that the wives are not keen on this they want the men to come out so that they can buy a house and settle down. So the Admiralty have come up with this clever idea that a chap signs on for 5 years they will give him a 10% on deposit on a house and it's what it says in there. Now I've got 3 outside waiting who have put in application for this, you can imagine there is a huge demand for this and the chap who runs it at the Admiralty is called the Admiralty Cash Supply Officer. I have spoken to him because I have come across him before and he says he doesn't understand any more than I do. Would you have a look at it? I had a look at this, it took about half an hour and thought about going at Stand Easy and saying yes I can cope with that.

But I didn't. I still had use of the office that I had had for the other chap, between then and next morning I rang three building society managers I knew in Bristol, I knew them quite well. In those days it wasn't the banks who were lending it was the Building Societies, and they got their money from Solicitors and Accountants investing clients' money with them. Therefore if I wanted a mortgage I could get it. I spoke to, I think it was Dennis Miller at the Bristol & West, Lionel Owen at the Britannia and David Littler at the Cheltenham and Gloucester, all of whom I knew quite well. I said would they care to do a 90% mortgage where the 10% was coming from the Admiralty and the chap was signed on with a guaranteed wage and marriage allowance for 5 years. That was ideal as far they were concerned. Well, I said I wanted a bit more than that because I knew they had countrywide connections with surveyors since these chaps were like babes in arms and I didn't want them to be seen off therefore I wanted a proper survey for each one so that they weren't paying over the odds I would deal with the insurance.

They were quite happy with that because the quality of the trade was there. The next day after Stand Easy I went to the office and said to the Chief Writer I've cracked it. I've had a word with the Cash Supply Officer and thank you for mentioning Bunny Austin to him, obviously that is the reason he is quite happy to talk to me, because Bunny is a client of mine. This chap said, well can you see these three. I said yes, I can see them,

but you have a problem nowadays because I am not allowed to advertise, I am not allowed to solicit for business so I need people to come to me who are recommended.

Well he said, Bunny is a client of yours, he can recommend you. I said ok done. In which case you tell them ok. These guys came in one at a time. I ascertained the various bits and pieces and I think one was buying locally the other two in their home by I think it was the Cheltenham and Gloucester and the Britannia. The one at Culdrose was Bristol and West, I had already got the forms in the post that morning so it was all duly completed. I explained to them that the rules and regulations said that I had to charge a specific fee on a scale and nobody could undercut this so they weren't putting themselves out by coming to me. On the other hand I would arrange for the surveys and I would arrange their insurance so that there could be no difficulty if they died and their mortgage would be paid off. Surely that is expensive, well not the way I do it. What I can arrange for you is that the insurance company will pay your mortgage payments for the rest of the term, and because that money comes out of income and not their capital their rates are extraordinarily cheap. The other thing I said, Look I am not allowed to underbid or undercut the fees. What I can do is I can make a Will for you and your wives for free. Why should we want to make a Will? We are too young to die. I said people do and there is your offspring you need to appoint guardians for your infant children. Ah so this was agreed. I got the work from three of them. By the end of that fortnight I had picked up just so much work it wasn't true. What people didn't realise, or I didn't realise is how small the Navy is even though it stretched as far as Trincomalee and various other points around the world in those days. I guess over the next two years while this system was operating I picked up probably 60% of that work which wasn't bad for me in my first six months as a Partner in the firm, it did me no harm whatsoever.

You would think that would be the end of this unusual annual training, but it wasn't. On Saturday I took a 42 foot cutter away with the family, mother in law and father in law, 2 children and Maggie and we had a marvellous day out. Went up as far as Truro came back and I think my parents in law were quite taken aback that I could do this kind of thing, we then came ashore and had a good meal and back I went.

On Sunday morning I had been lined up to fly to the Scilly Isles, in a much larger helicopter ostensibly it was to deliver the replacement knife batteries for Harold Wilsons communications network, because he was then Prime Minister and week ended in The Scilly Isles where he had a bungalow, but in fact it was so that he could have the Sunday papers delivered to him without cost. However, that was a great day that was, all the way to the Scilly's and then half the morning coming in low over the other Islands trying to catch out the nude bathers but that's another story again.

You would think that that was the end of it, it was lovely annual training but on the Monday I think it was I was in the Mess and up comes a Royal Marine Colour Sergeant, who asks about my Royal Naval Reserve flash and did it apply to the Royal Marines. Curiously enough I did know because my neighbour in Hamilton Road, Pete Weeks was a Royal Marine Reserve and we did some joint exercises with them so I knew all about

Dorset House and had been up there from time to time. I explained to this chap all about it sincere was coming outside and wanted to stay in as it were. At the end of the conversation he pulls out a card and he scribbled something on the back. He said you have got your family here on Wednesday or Thursday afternoon, I have forgotten which, at 2.00pm be at Goon Hilly Down. At this location you will see there a 5 tonner with a young 1 pip lad and he will take you out on to Goon Hilly Down where he will be practising for the Commentary on our Exhibition for Olympia or wherever it was. We go out to Goon Hilly Down kids and Maggie gets lifted into the 5 tonner, and off we go, and then in come the Choppers, and the guys are abseiling and firing and generally causing mayhem and my kids have never forgotten it even in their mid-fifties. They will talk about it now as marvellous climax to that holiday which for them as it was and for me a most unusual annual training ever.

The next tale relates to Rod Packer, Shirley's husband. Now Rod and I knew each other in 1952 when he was in the Eagle which used to tie up ahead of us in Portsmouth and we used to come up on the same coach at weekends along with a chap called Johnny Ireland who was also in Eagle as a Signaller I think. There were others of course from the Illustrious as well. We met up again at the Fox when we came out from our National Service. Rod was an electrician, although he worked in Wills in the Accounts Department, he was a practical chap and wanted to do something more than that. So we both joined the Junior Rates Mess at Fox and progressed upwards together, he became a Leading Electrician, I became a Leading Seaman and in due course we both picked up our second hook and still wearing the square rig of course for the first year we then went into the Chiefs and Petty Officers Mess.

Now we arrived at the same time and it was I think the first week there was a special meeting of the Chiefs and Petty Officers Mess called at which we were present. Now President was Curly Parsons and his deputy I think was Gilbert Gange. Curly stands up and says Gentlemen I am sorry to have to tell you but the bar has lost £200. Consternation, calls for resignation etc., etc., and so on. Curly was made of sterner stuff, he simply said, look what we can do is we are going to have to look into this, the only keys are held by me and the barman and I certainly didn't drink £200, nor did he because he has a job he wants to keep. What I suggest is this, we have two members who have joined tonight, one works in the Accounts Department of Wills, that's Rod Packer, and the other works in a lawyer's office that is Bob Baxter. I suggest that we appoint them to investigate the matter and report back. Everybody accepted this and so it was. Curly gave us all the bits and pieces and we had the invoices and we checked everything, end ways, backwards, sideways. Rob was quite good at accounts and I wasn't stupid and we got together and we met up but we realised we were getting nowhere with this and there was nothing we could find out. Unless it was absolutely being stolen by someone who had managed to copy the key.

In those days it was the key to the door of the Mess, because the bar was open. However, after a while, not too long, I was on a maintenance weekend at the Fox, a rating who was a Leading Hand came aboard, looking for whatever. We were having a beer at Stand Easy, and he says have you and Rod got anywhere with your enquiries?

What do you know about that? Well don't be stupid he says, of course everybody knows about it, and I don't think you have, have you. No I said we haven't. Well he says I will tell you now, its Colin Wren. Now Colin was the previous President of the Mess and he was a very senior Chief Petty Officer, but he was a bit of a lush. Colin it transpired had a history, during the War he had married young and was seconded to Canada for pilot training. While he was there his wife went off with an American he got a Dear John washed out the course and ended up on North Atlantic Conveys. Destroyers or Corvettes.

He took to the drink did Colin. When he came back his firm in Bristol, Mardon Son and Hall, gave him a job where he walked from factory to factory or caught the bus and his job consisted entirely of checking on the water levels in lead acid batteries, so he simply topped them all up with distilled water and went on to the next one. Along the way of course he would come along Hotwells and stop off at 11.00 o'clock, he had kept the key from when he had been the President, he came into the Mess and would polish off half a bottle of brandy, or half a bottle of scotch and move on. The Leading Hand was quite clear, yes he had seen him and he knew all about it and it was down to us.

We called a meeting with Gilbert Gange and Curly Parsons and explained the situation. I thought it was a master class in how to deal with these things, on the part of old Curly who was not an educated man but he was quite educated in the way the world was, having been a Chief Stoker and spent the War in the North Atlantic. First thing he said, was, well if it is we can't charge him, because it is a Court Martial offence, and you are not going to do that to Colin, because we will never as a Mess be allowed our autonomy, therefore we don't do that, what I suggest is this. That we put a cage around the bar with a lock or two locks and the new keys of which the barman who is a Ship Keeper will have one and I as President will have the other. The key of the door, which we are the only two holders technically and Colin is obviously a third will be changed and every member will have to pay 2/6 to buy his new key. If we do that, he said, there will be so much outcry about having to pay 2/6 for a new key that they will forget all about the £200 loss, and forget all about who did it. Do you know he was right, there was more upset over this half a crown and quietly the whole inquiry business was forgotten.

It was Colin, there was no doubt about it, his life went on to become even more unfortunate, he got to know a young Wren and she was smitten by his obvious charms and they got engaged, came to me to deal with the buying of a house up in Kingswood as I remember, arranged a mortgage everything, was all ready to sign the Contract, when she came back from her annual training in Gibraltar. Out in Gibraltar she fell for the charms of some young officer and Colin got the second Dear John at which his drinking hit new highs on the Richter scale. In later years he retired, he had to after his fifth five at the Flying Fox. He still worked for Mardons still did his job because he didn't drive he walked around and after his Mother died, because he lived at home he moved into the Seaman's Mission in Queens Square, and ultimately I heard many years later that he had died. Recently I met a chap he told me that he was the chap who had to

identify Colin. Apparently had set fire to his bed in the Seaman's Mission and climbed into it, obviously drunk out of his mind, you never know.

Yet another tale of the characters at the Fox there were all sorts and lots of things happened there. There were two Leading Hands along with me in the Junior Rates Mess back in the Fifties, and we knew each other quite well, we went to sea together and these two were both shift workers. Their occupations were totally different but they both worked shift work, and they were both having affairs. Long term affairs. They got together and decided that they would buy a caravan at Brean Sands, which they did and they boxed and coxed it. They were in constant touch, they knew when they were on shift and when they weren't they were entertaining their paramours in fact it was a long term relationship with both of them with ladies who shall we say were way above their station in life.

It was quite well known, or at least it was known to me, as were so many things. However, one of them retired on his very good pension sent for me one day. He told me that he had been booked in for an operation to scrape the arteries that go up the back of the neck because they were corroding or becoming full of muck. It was a dangerous operation there was a potential for death and he wanted to put his affairs in order.

I made a Will and I suggested that the simplest way was to put all the items that he had, into the joint names of him and his wife, so that if anything happened to him it would automatically go to her and if he became incapacitated she could operate the accounts without any difficulty. But I did warn him, I said for God's sake just get rid of any reference to the caravan and the girl friend. Yes, I'll do that he said, and off he went, of sound mind knowing exactly what he was doing. A week later he goes in for the operation and had a massive stroke on the table, so much so that he couldn't return home and had to be looked after in a nursing home. His wife came to see me later on, she said you got it right that I don't have to get probate because everything is in joint names, thank you very much indeed. But you see I have found out now that he was having this long term affair with this woman and I find now also that I am going to have to pay for his up-keep in the nursing home. My son and I are so devastated by this long term affair which he has had that neither of us are going to visit him ever. And I think they kept that up.

There was no question of getting at me she didn't know I knew and I didn't vouchsafe that I did, but in due course the other one I came to know even better, because I met him on business over about five or ten years, and I did warn him. I said again for God's sake just do get rid of any reference. Oh he said I've still got the caravan and still got the girlfriend, I said well just be careful, there is a good chap.

In due course he shuffled off as well. Well this time I knew about it before hand and I rang his wife and I said look I know it is a difficult time for you would it help you at all if I came and went through his papers and sorted things out for you. I will deal with the Probate he was a good friend of mine, I'll deal with it on that basis. Well, she was only too pleased, so I went along and managed to clear out any reference in his papers to

the caravan or the lady friend or any of the capers that had been going on over the years and wound up the estate. His wife still thinks was is the pillar of society that everybody thought he was. I do get some things right.

Then there is the one that could be called the Wedding. Now one Thursday night in the Chief's and Petty Officers Mess we had a party for a chap called A who had been drafted for two and half years on the Gambia to the Far East. That was how it was done in those days. And so on Friday morning after a hectic Thursday night I am in the office and the phone goes, yes it was a good party. Bob can we get married by proxy? J is a girlfriend. So I said, J you are 30 years old you should know better than that. No its nothing like that she says, but we were talking in the night, as you do, and we realised that if we got married and A is away for two and a half years, the marriage allowance would amount to enough for a deposit on a house. So can we get married by proxy? Well I am sorry dear, the answer is no you cannot. But is the ship calling anywhere? Yes, it's calling at Gibraltar in 4 days time to refuel. I see in which case, why don't you talk to a travel agent and see if you can get a flight and a holiday in Gibraltar for a week and I will see if I can arrange for you to get married then. Please ring me back later today and we will see what we can do.

In those days of course, before subscriber trunk dialling one had to go through dozens of operators and so I delegated this job which is highly complex to my secretary and fairly shortly afterwards, she said Oh the Registrar of Marriages, Deaths and Births in Gibraltar is on the line. I spoke to this chap, who was called Hector Fortunato. I explained the position that A was a Petty Officer on board Gambia which would be calling at Gibraltar, Yes, he said she's in at 12.00 noon on Wednesday and she will be gone at 16.30. Simply refuelling. I said, well they would like to get married and I told him about the marriage allowance which gave him a chuckle and I said was it possible. Oh Yes, it is perfectly alright I can do that he says, the only thing is the paperwork, have they got their Birth Certificates, I said Yes. Have they been married before, Yes, Are they divorced, Yes. If they bring all of those Certificates together with their Passport or Pay Book in his case, then I can marry them. I'll make the appointment for the woman at 13.00, to produce the papers if she has got them and for 13.30 to get the Wedding. Thank you very much I will ring and confirm. I then spoke to J she confirmed, because she is a very efficient woman, that she had all the relevant papers including an up to date Passport for herself together with his papers. She had also now managed to get herself on a flight to Gibraltar and a week in the Hotel Bristol. I explained that she should pitch up at the office of Hector Fortunato with the papers, gave her the address and said that I really did need to speak to or get confirmation from A that he wanted to get married because of course unless he did it wouldn't work. Well I think either the ship hadn't sailed, so the land line was still in, or I did it through the CRO of course we were on the net then. I think it was the latter because of what happened later on. That was that, I put it to bed on the Friday and forgot about it.

A week later I got a call from J saying I am now Mrs. D. I said oh best of luck, how did it go. Well she said I arrived at 1 o'clock and produced the papers, he was satisfied. A arrived at 1.30, we were married. 2.00 o'clock we came out his ship mates in the Mess



had commandeered a gharry and they towed us back to the ship. On the jetty there was an awning and a table, with drinks and a wedding cake made by the chefs on board. At 4.00 the whole thing disappeared, and the ship sailed at 4.30, and I went back to the Hotel. That was that.

Two and a half years later he came back and they bought a house in Clevedon. J is a very good business woman. . Normally I wouldn't mention this kind of thing because it was all part of what I did, but a year or two back I was talking to Alec McCoy, who figures in another story and Alec said that he had been in Troon because he worked at Faslane he and his wife Maureen, were talking to couple on the Jetty there and the chap said you sound like a Bristolian. Alec said yes. Ah said the man I was at the Flying Fox and it transpires it was A and J, and they told Alec the story of the wedding. Please remember us to Bob. So therefore I feel free it is out and I can do this. It really was one of the better things I ever did.

This brings me on to Alec McCoy who joined the Flying Fox as did I at seventeen. My first recollection of him is on Illustrious when he was a Stoker and I was an Ordinary Seaman. He regaled me with the tale of when I was covered in paint after painting the ship side and somebody had upset a pot of paint all over me. I do remember.

In later years we were back at the Flying Fox, and Alec progressed from a Stoker to ERA and in due course on the Venturer as was I went to Cherbourg, I think I was the Coxswain and I believe the Captain was Uncle Arthur Franklin, The Chief ERA was Roy Everard, I know Wally Hodge was on board and so was Alan Burden. We had had a hectic night I had been turned out at about midnight because somebody coming back off shore had managed to fall. You had to come back over the top of the U boat pens which was up a load of steps and then down the other side, and this chap had slipped and broken his leg. I had been called out and we had had to go up with the Neil Robertson Stretcher, strap him in, bring him down and get the derrick out to bring him on board. Alan Burden still complains that I woke him and pinched his bunk to put the chap in.

Next day I am off ashore at ten past four with various others including Alan, I have forgotten who else was in the party, when suddenly three fire engines, sappers and pompiers went roaring past and I don't know whether it is my imagination but I think it was followed by a taxi, a somewhat white faced Arthur Franklin. Later on we heard from Wally Hodge that he had come ashore and he had told Roy Everard that the ship was sinking. Roy told him to pull the other one and that was that. Well in fact the ship was sinking because what had happened, was that Alec McCoy was the Duty ERA left on board, Roy had told him to strip down some pump, and Alec had managed not to isolate the pump before he stripped it down, The muddy waters of Cherbourg harbour were pouring in through a six inch opening and really enough got in before he could stop it to have to call in the Fire Brigade. We never let Alec live it down over all the years. He was one of the diners club and I speak to him a couple of times a year he sends me the most outrageous emails of all sorts of things that he gets from all around, but it is a good memory.

Of course there were bound to be collisions and accidents after all the minesweepers were training ships and designated as such in the hands of amateurs in the RNVR and the RNR as it became. I guess somebody in the Admiralty decided to write all these things off as training accidents because that is what they became.

Besides the one in Cherbourg which was quite notorious, the first one I encountered with was in Plymouth or Portsmouth, I am not sure which, one Friday night. I am not long in I am a Leading Hand on the forecastle. Dave Blanchard is the Cox'n and he is a Petty Officer, We are going out to sea it is dark and suddenly around a knuckle comes a harbour pinnace a little boat, quite sharp nosed, and it ran straight into the side of the Venturer, hitting her just forward of the bulkhead between the Stokers and the Lower Seaman's Mess Deck. Poked the nose straight through the ship which after all was made of wood, and backed off and limped away. Now the Captain, whoever he was, and I can't remember immediately ordered the anchor to be dropped so as to bring the ship to a standstill. It was no use manoeuvring around making waves until somebody knew what had happened.

Well I was the Killick of the Forecastle the anchor was always partially lowered in a position whereby all you had to do was knock off the deck clench and it would run out. There was no difficulty for me here, I'd seen this done and been part of the arrangements in Illustrious over perhaps two or three months entering and leaving harbour, so that was second nature especially as we had all had, or certainly I had had tuition of the model forecastles, both in the Sea Cadets and at the Flying Fox over the years, but I certainly had had real experience.

The anchor was dropped, we backed off, and I was deputed to stay on deck putting a foot on the anchor cable from time to time to feel if it was dragging. Somebody else on the bridge was put on anchor watch, to take sightings of various markers to see the ship wasn't drifting. Meanwhile the black gang, the Stokers, damage control party. Had got out of their stores the necessary pieces of bulks of timber to shore up from the inside which they did, and we let Action Man Dave Blanchard go over the side on a Bos'n's Chair where he affixed a piece of Fearnought, the fire fighters clothing which went over the hole and then hit on a copper tingle. We hauled him back in, recovered the anchor and went to sea. It was after all a training accident. We knew how to cope with it.

The best one ever was at Admirals inspection in around 1964 I think it must have been, may have been 1964, but what happened was this. The powers that be had decided the Admiral should be picked up at the top of the reach on the Centre from his car and come aboard together with his ADC and the two and a half in charge of the ship, the Venturer, would bring her astern down the reach, do a 90 degree turn at Prince Street Bridge, come down past the Flying Fox down to Under Fall Yard, turn the ship around and ease gently back up alongside Flying Fox, where the Admiral would step over from one ship to the other to the strains of the Opening Bars of The Commodore from Iolanthe, performed by the marine band from either Portsmouth or Plymouth or

whichever, which was the most expensive four bars of music ever, because this happened everywhere a Commodore went on board a ship.

Usually it was deal with by a two and half, and there was always two Ringer in the Engine room plus probably one of the Chief ERA's. On the wheel was normally one of the Coxswains, which would have been Dave Blanchard, Dave Penny, Wilf Phillips, Colin Wren and several others including me, who had all done the job and were all quite senior, either Chiefs or Petty Officers, and we had all been to sea on countless occasions. As far as I was concerned I was very well versed in what went on in the wheel house because during my National Service on Illustrious I had spent six months as Special Sea Duty Man and my day job as well when we were at sea was helmsman in the lower steering position as it was called, which was seven decks down and you accessed it by a small hatch, so you never got out if there was anything really serious that happened.

My initial entering into this was when we left Portsmouth in November of 1951, for Cyprus, and we ran there at 30 knots for 7 days, came back at 30 knots for 7 days and did the same thing over again, so I was well versed, later on I still held this position as Special Sea Duty man and we were doing trials and training in and out of Stokes Bay and in and out of Portsmouth, on a regular basis, five days a week. So the responses and what you were looking for came automatically. This was reflected with all the others virtually. We normally did this job, and it was not difficult, you would have in the wheel house alongside of you a couple of Able Seaman technically as telegraphs men. Now again, for whatever reason what was perfectly possible on the Venturer to rig the telegraphs to go direct from the bridge to the engine room, but no it true Pusser fashion it had to go through the motions. This had been run successfully for many years, no trouble at all.

This particular year, there had been an amalgamation between the Fleet Air Arm Reserve and the RNR, which meant that Engine Fitters etc, would become ERAs or Stokers or whatever, and the Chief Aircraft Handlers, (in fact there weren't that many about) were transferred to the Seaman branch. We had one called Stan Court. Now Stan was a fairly laid back character, he was in fact an Air Traffic Controller up at Swindon or somewhere like that, and so not a lot bothered Stan. But he was not a seaman, he had been to sea at weekends on the Venturer, he had had tuition, but it wasn't automatic responses and neither was he in a position to pick up when something was going wrong which only comes, really by experience. It was decided that Stan would be the Coxswain on this particular trip and just to see fair play George Hunt who was Captain of the Flying Fox, and a very good ship handler (although he knew it,) had decided to go and pick up the Admiral personally, instead of waiting on board the Fox to greet him. Off they go and pick up the Admiral in due course. Come down alongside the Fox and we are all lined up on the deck, either in the signals school or outside, I can't remember at this stage in the proceedings. We heard the ship come down and normally we would have heard the Doppler effect as she went away down to Underfall Yard. Instead of which tremendous commotion with the engines followed by a great big thump. Sounded very expensive and all the Coxswains grinned and then there was

another thump and then there was a silence and then there was a patter, which increased of masonry falling into water, and we all knew what had happened. The ship finally came gently alongside and the 4 bars were played by the Royal Marines, the Admiral looked as though he had had his fillings shaken, stepped on board and conducted the inspection with George Hunt in attendance. Someone took the ship away, turned her around and put her alongside in her berth. Well, there is no doubt about it that all the Coxswains had a fit of what the Germans call Schadenfreude, in other words amusement at the misfortunes of others. Stan came into the Mess later on and everyone is asking what happened. It wasn't my bloody fault he said, he gave the wrong order. Stan could have misheard it because after all he was used to really clear radio communications whereas this came down a brass funnel, there was quite a lot of noise going on anyway. Stan only had to repeat the orders and deal with the wheel orders and then it was up to the telegraphs men to put the engine orders on. What had obviously happened is George had given the order and either he had given it the wrong way around or Stan misinterpreted it, repeated it before George could say anything the 35 degrees of starboard wheel was on and Johnny Burden who was the telegraphs man and his mate, whose name escapes me, had whacked on appropriate engine room orders. Now down in the engine room they couldn't see where they were going they had no idea so they simply put it on. Anyway, there was the usual court of enquiry and it was put down as a training accident. But the sound of the masonry falling into the harbour was absolutely very, very funny as far as we were all concerned.

At that time one had to serve a National Service of two years and then three years on what was called the "Z" Reserve. This meant that you were called up for three weeks in each of three years and you had no say as to when or what you did, it would have been either Barracks or Naval ship. The alternative was to re-join the RNVR, now I had been in it from March 1950 to May of 1951, so I had a fair idea of how that worked. It was enjoyable, it was a club of course, we had a bar you did things you were trained and it was in effect a social club. So I opted to sign on again, I found when I went back that it was no longer the RNVR it was the RNR they had been amalgamated, didn't matter. There was one other thing which I had done a bit of research on. First of all the Officer on the Illustrious had said that I could be made up to Killick. In a year, well I found that by going back with Flying Fox I could go off and do a fortnight's course and obtain Leading Hand Position and then fairly shortly after that I could go off and do a similar course to become a Petty Officer. I would have to do 2 or 3 years annual training as a Leading Hand first. The point about that was that I would hold all these positions in the RNR as war substantive, so that if we were called up as these guys Bonner and Carpenter had been and I was a Leading Hand or Petty Officer, I would go back in at that rating. Whereas if I did Z reserve I wouldn't. All in all I thought Flying Fox was the best thing to do and I signed on willingly for 5 years. As I have said elsewhere I did the Leading Hand's Course and Petty Officer's Course and I could not at that time have ever considered or comprehended or had any idea about how it was to stand me in such good stead later on.

**Bob Baxter - 2017**