

ANDY BRIERLEY'S BLOG

Hello Shipmates,

The middle part of 2017, as far as the 'popular press' is concerned, must have been the worst in Royal Navy history. Senior officers, Admirals have joined the chorus of condemnation. They say it will be foolhardy to go in harm's way with today's hardware, or lack of. We sail with insufficient bunkers, 'one engine' reported not too long ago. 4.4 missile mags., half empty, no ship-to-ship missiles, no F.A.A. cover, no maritime patrol aircraft, insufficient mechanics for the posts available.

That's all fact, not popular muck raking. How, I wonder in the face of all that, does a captain keep up moral? He must be aware his crew are party to the same information. How will he justify putting to sea, 'suicide missions' are not in the modern young westerner's psyche.

Could a 'Potemkin' type incident occur? Famous mutiny in 1905 when that battle ship refused to sail - a ghastly thought.

On a previous occasion when things R.N. verged on a similar breakdown of the service, it was an Admiral who took up the cudgel; a serving Admiral and Third Sea Lord who played a major part/role in what British History knows as 'the Navy Scare'. Its result was the cabinet embarking on a massive five year construction programme in 1893.

The Admiral was John Fisher, reported as a man of cast iron religious conviction, who had learned the only road to peace was to 'carry a big stick'. He is famously quoted for declaring; 'The essence of war is violence - moderation in war is imbecility'. His keen interest in the lower deck understood a 'fierce pride in their ship and service' was paramount. How do we follow that truism now? He altered food, living conditions, discipline and instituted a route to advancement for the lower deck.

I recall my last rant lamented the fact 'Naval History' is no longer a subject for cadets at Dartmouth. How will they know of predecessors like Fisher who, amongst other modernisations, was instrumental in getting the First Sea Lord - Churchill, to fuel his ships with oil instead of coal?

The 2017 comment could be 'So what?'

Back then, such a radical move scared our peers into a mad rush for their subsidised bars in Westminster, fearful the move may erode bloated expense accounts.

Shotley told me 70% of the earth's surface is water, 90% of world trade is hauled by sea. Fossil fuels still power the world, and 50% of it reaches the customer by sea.

Nearer to home; a bit of information dropped in a programme last week about life saving in the North Sea, said in 24 hours 1000 vessels of all descriptions will be in that safety section. R.N.'s current influence out there is nil. We are actually being laughed at by our most scary opponent above 33° N.

A return to 1950 numbers is pie in the sky. Sufficient to be proud of was eminently feasible for the cash available over the last 30 years, even though they were 'peace bonus' austerity years.

I thought 'destroyer conversions' to A's frigates had little effect on their sleek looks, when fitted with 'limbo' were a lethal answer to the frigate shortage. Hard usage and age put most of these in breakers' yards.

I was acquainted with one, name of Grenville, if memory serves correctly. Gun tub in front of the bridge held a 'twin Bofor' to deactivate a torch was put through barrels four foot from the end, they lay in the tub. At the time I had a silly plan to acquire the mount to which my Italian boss had no objection. Where to stow it in my circumstances at the time killed the scheme.

That may have been all to the good, some called it a 'flak mount'. Had I gone home and confessed 'we own a Bofor mounting dear' the flak would have been intense around my ears, perhaps unendurable.

Have a few colour slides of the vessel during this period, a dirt streaked sad sight.



Whilst on sleek conversions, one that twanged my thong was the ex. Battle Class *Matapan*. She became the Admiralty 'sonar trials ship'. A second funnel fitted is not distinct in my small pic. when enlarged. It was the exhaust for installed extra generation capacity. I can imagine the draughtsman in Pompey dockyard when given the task, he must have been an old romantic to put that lovely 'clipper bow' on her.

The other diagram made my jaw drop.

Year of 1898 British Imperial R.N. stations. Note they show only Capital ships. Lord knows how many 'destroyer torpedo boats' provided their screens.



North America and West Indies station with 15 capitals explains the Bermuda dockyard's size. It must have put heaps of cash into their economy.

What do you think?

I'm off!



Jo was scrolling through our website for me. I was surprised to see D. Repard in the crossing the bar page. The late Fred practised a 'No officers policy'. Why I do not know, being a late comer to 'his association'. To see that policy has been quietly pumped with the bilge water removes a wart from our escutcheon. That is not a slur on Fred who got me back in touch with friends of 50 odd years ago.

To me, simply writing Repard is unmannered, rude. He did not have the officer habit of using ones bald surname - always Able Seaman that conferred a status, a recognition of your worth in the larger picture. He was interested in your hopes and aspirations, what made me a 'Shotley Boy', messing, schooling, discipline, who were my instructors etc.. On rare occasions, when chewing the fat in the small office, he lapsed to first names - that sticks - as only my mother ever called me Andrew. He had a keen interest in a previous job I had, a very small part in trying to sweep ground mines with a Heath Robinson towed contraption of induction coils and my, then, Captain Roberts V.C..

Lieutenant Commander Repard was my senior officer, not simply because he was elevated in the 'pecking order', more because he had a feel for his people. His natural demeanour engendered a concrete loyalty in the T.S.A. branch (his speciality). 'Gunners are not the same at all, do you think it is due to them ever shouting at each other in as loud a voice a possible?'

I learn, on the website, Lieutenant Commander Repard was passed over for a 'ring' captain. The noble lords shot themselves in the foot - again. I see him in the Commander Walker of *Starling* mode, another master of his trade, passed over till the 'merde hits the fan!' The popular conception of the lower decks as senseless sodomites has its place in novels. The majority of the 'pecked' are sharp enough to know, a few months into commission, which officer is worth his berth.

It may sound bumptious, but I consider, however you slice it, Lieutenant Commander Repard was my shipmate. 'I salute you sire and am certain you 'Rest in Peace''.

Tatty Bye



There's an article on Commander Repard later in this magazine. Click [HERE](#) to read