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Service Story of Lt Cdr Brian Beel RN

It was early September in 1955 when a jeep was waiting for me at Fareham station. I'd had a long and tedious rail journey down the spine of England. Nobody had told me that it was quicker to go via London. I was taken to the Wardroom at HMS *Collingwood* and shown where to take my belongings – a Nissan hut just across the road.

Returning to the Wardroom, I encountered people in naval uniform for the first time. Having been brought up in a small market town in North East Yorkshire I had seen none around those parts. Eventually, other bemused bodies, including my future cabin mate, Jim Teasdale, were rounded up for dinner by an elderly two and a half (the common term for the rank Lieutenant Commander) and after the meal we all retired to the bar to start to get to know each other.

The next morning - there were about a dozen of us - we were taken in hand by the formidable Instructor Lieutenant Commander 'Yogi' Parkin. Whether we marched to our classroom or not I cannot remember but, if we didn't, then it was the only occasion from then until Christmas. For four months we were taught heavy electrics and radio with the odd aside, mainly drill. 'Yogi' did not suffer fools gladly and there were a few of us in that category. Not a lot was learned about the Royal Navy other than its past and that was badly timed in the schedule. It was taken by a young Lieutenant, the first period after lunch, and initially one could remain awake for the first twenty minutes or so. After a while, the effect of him coming through the door induced immediate hypnotic sleep.



Sub Lieutenant Brian Beel Royal Navy at HMS *Collingwood*, 1955

We all went our separate ways at the end of the term and all later departed when they had completed their short service commission of three years. After Christmas leave I joined up with John Exworthy and Peter Rogers at HMS *Ariel* (Worthy Down). They were from the same entry but had taken a more conventional route via the training carriers. My turn for these came in the summer when I joined HMS *Ocean* in Devonport. We were the first ship to visit Hamburg after the war. Again, none of my new companions stayed beyond three years but I was surprised to see, some years later, that one, 'Jock' Gulliver had become the Chief Executive Officer of TESCO and remained so until his untimely death thirty, or so, years ago.

HMS *Vanguard* was alongside in Devonport and when some other trainees arrived aboard *Ocean* the Sub Lieutenants amongst us were moved across to HMS *Vanguard* to sleep in hammocks, which was quite an experience. On returning to Worthy Down I found that we were all moving to HMS *Daedalus*, as the *Ariel* Training Unit. Here I met up with Dick Abram, from the following year's entry. Although Dick and I were at Durham University at the same time, he was at Hatfield and I was at Kings and we hadn't met. But at Hatfield, at the same time, was Frank Tyson, the subsequent England cricketer, and I opened the bowling with him for the University.

Eighteen months later I was posted to HMS *Harrier* at Kete in Pembrokeshire. As I was playing cricket for the RN at the time, through pressure from Gerry Tordoff and Ken Bowell, I was soon moved back to HMS *Collingwood* and joined the same section as Glynn Thomas, who covered for me in the summer and I for him when he played rugby, in the winter.

Subsequently, I followed Gerry Tordiff as the second IO, to do the long Sports Officers' course at Pitt Street in Portsmouth. He was Sports Officer at HMS *Collingwood* and I went in the same role to HMS *Sultan*. Two years later, I returned to HMS *Collingwood* to teach mathematics to apprentices. This ended my classroom career as an IO, a total of less than six years in front of a chalkboard.

My second ship was the Devonport based, HMS *Adamant* in the role of 2nd Submarine Squadron Instructor Officer. We ploughed our way across the Atlantic at less than 10 knots and I also had a few extended trips in the submarines, going to Gibraltar and Amsterdam, my main task being to tutor any rating needing academic help in his bid for promotion. HMS *Adamant* was under the command of Captain Scott of 'The man who never was' fame.'



Submarine support ship HMS *Adamant* alongside with six submarines; briefing Captain Scott aboard *Adamant* at sea

The Met course at HMS *Culdrose* followed, and, on completion, I went to the Northern outpost of Lossiemouth. I then had my first trip to the Far East and Australia, serving two years in HMS *Ark Royal*, again based in Devonport. As we had bought a house in Alverstoke, at the latter end of my time at HMS *Collingwood*, I was away from home, where the family remained, for almost six years – about as long as a pre-war appointment on the China station!

I flew out to Singapore in a piston-engined *Britannia* to join *Ark Royal*, taking about twenty hours with two stops. Although a very junior two and a half, I was the most senior officer on the flight and while dozing in my seat, when somewhere over

the Indian Ocean, I was woken with a hand on my shoulder with “Sir, the wing’s on fire”. It turned out to be being caused by the de-icing equipment and was soon extinguished, on switching off, but, on landing, I noted quite a large brown hole in the wing’s trailing edge!

While HMS *Ark Royal* was docked in Singapore, I went with the air squadrons to Butterworth in Malaya. One afternoon an Australian helicopter pilot asked me if I would like a trip into the jungle where he was doing medical rounds. Having landed in a remote area, he unexpectedly had to airlift a patient, so I was left behind in a clearing with only one ‘long house’. As no one had known of my trip, had he had a mishap and not returned, I could be there to this day!

The Met Office at Lee-on-Solent was a convenient appointment for the following 18 months before being appointed to HMS *Blake*, my fourth ship and a second trip round Australia and the Far East.



Lieutenant Commander Brian Beel as Met Officer serving in the Far East; HMS *Blake* in the early 1970s

Subsequently, I went again to HMS *Sultan*, to run the course design section, where, as well as developing the courses ashore, we produced task books for all grades of Engineering ratings serving in every type of ship. My final posting, after a management course, was to CINCFleet’s staff, one task of which was to write job descriptions for the man himself and all his subordinates at Northwood.

I retired in 1980 after 25 enjoyable years and ‘saw the world’ visiting Newfoundland, America, Australia, Gan, Penang, Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong, Kenya, South Africa, St. Helena, Ascension Island, Morocco, Gibraltar, Malta, Holland, France, Spain and Germany(East and West).

I played cricket or went horse racing in many. Had I been in any other employment it is highly unlikely that I would have been able to play so much cricket and have the opportunity of playing on such grounds as Edgbaston, the Oval and five times at Lords. The ‘rampart’ theory was in vogue where an Instructor Officer specialised in particular disciplines. I, however, had lots of little ‘turrets’ of various shapes and sizes.

My latter appointments led to my self employment as an independent training and management consultant. A lifelong interest in point-to-point and hunterchase racing resulted in my becoming, until my ‘proper’ retirement, a regular columnist in the Times and The Sporting Life.

