



HMS Falcon in October 1949 was fully operational and was used not only by us but other navies of the world including a US marine squadron of Corsairs and a Pakistan squadron of Sea Fury's also visiting Neptune aircraft flying in from Port Lyautey in North Africa. The base was divided into three sections Kalafrana, Main camp where the officers and aircrew were based and middle camp where our victualling office was situated.

The office (or rather half of the Nissan hut, the other half being where we lived) served all all three camps. It was supervised by CPO(V) Costigan who lived ashore and came in daily from 0900 to 1300 hrs.

Having left the UK in traditional autumn weather it was a welcome surprise to me that not only was it still hot but the base operated a tropical routine all year around. Dressed only in shorts and sandals and of course the compulsory hat we were up just before the Chief arrived and started work. Afterwards just as soon as the Chief left I opened the rum store with the Officer of the day, issued the rum rations to the ratings and my workday was over.



The large victualling store situated at Middle camp was supervised by three stores assistants them being the only Royal navy staff permanently living there. We were given two Maltese helpers and a butcher who was ex-navy and the use of transport as required from the MT section at the Main camp.

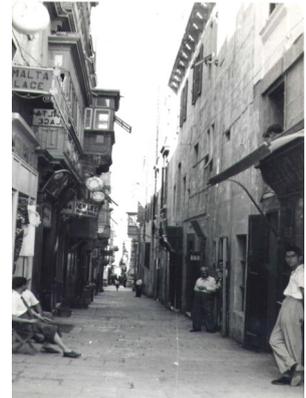


Photo of myself and SA Last from Ipswich together with the two Maltese helpers whose names I cant recall but will be ever grateful for teaching me basic Maltese.

We took turns of duties not only at night but also at weekends and off duty usually passed the time down at Norah's Bar playing poker dice which for the uninitiated meant the first winner named the drink, the second paid for it and the third person drank it. Assuming they would not have to drink the mixture the most diabolical cocktails would be invented which sometimes had a nasty habit of backfiring on the originator of that particular concoction.

A lot has been spoken of the infamous "Gut" at Strait street in Valetta where the navy spent not only a lot of time but also a lot of money at the "New Life" or "Egyptian Queen" bars where Jack paid outrageous amounts of his pay on drinks for the girls which consisted of plain coloured water of which the bar owner got fifty per cent and sometimes the girl the same. At the same time in Floriana there was the "Klondike Music Hall" where female impersonators performed every evening.

Being stationed at Halfar the only transport into Valetta was by the local bus service an experience anyone that has done so will hardly forget. The driver travels the entire journey with one foot on the accelerator and one hand on the horn so it came as no surprise he needed that picture of the Madonna on the back of his cab.



I spent a considerable time travelling around the Island visiting Military Bay, Sleima creek and St. Pauls bay all now tourist holiday resorts so unlike those days when two piece bathing costumes were not allowed and the local women went into the sea totally covered in black dresses.



Back at the airfield tests were being carried out on Sea Fury's to improve take off time by the introduction of rocket assisted take off gear, sometimes they did but not without casualties.

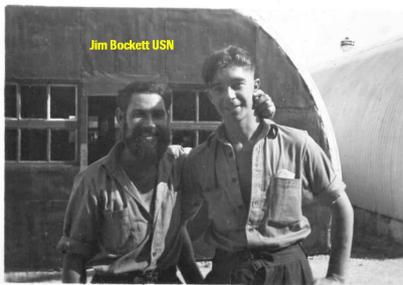
At the same time various types of landings were being carried out including a one engine landing with a Mosquito bomber which resulted in the loss of my favourite commissioned Pilot Mr Joplin.



This was the first time my "Ceres" training was to be put to use by using entering DD (discharged dead) in the ships books.



Lower Camp HMS Falcon showing Nissen huts (one of which was our combined victualling office and home) where visiting air forces from abroad were billeted. In 1950 we had both American and Pakistan squadrons based here. With very few British ratings on camp we ate well with the Americans in the large dining room where they were intrigued to watch the issue of our daily rum ration whereas they had to be content with limejuice and they have the nerve to call us Limeys.



The Americans were a great bunch of people and we made very good friends with them sharing many a can of beer in the evenings back in our quarters but unfortunately the Korean War had started and they were urgently required elsewhere. I often wonder what happened to people like Jim Bockett who before being enlisted ran a gas station somewhere in Southern California.

I well remember waking and looking outside one morning to see everyone dressed in what I thought was their night shirts not realising of course it was the end of Ramadan and they were celebrating happy Eid they were a happy and friendly crowd.

Princess Elizabeth talking to visiting American aircrew when she was married to Prince Phillip who was serving on HMS Chequers at the time later to take command of HMS Magpie.

In October 1950 I was told to report to the Commander (S) where I was promoted to the rank of Leading stores assistant which came as a complete surprise to me but I welcomed the extra pay that went with it. Another assistant was refused promotion on the strength of his Divisional officers report which read "Works hard, tries hard, gets nowhere, man with his mind in a perpetual muddle" which I thought was cruel.



At almost the same time as I was made LSA their Lordships in their wisdom decided to allow WRNS to be drafted abroad for the first time the end result being yours truly leaving the delights of Falcon and being sent to sea aboard HMS Vigo a battle class destroyer operating in the Mediterranean. When I had finally forgiven the admiralty for their actions fate once again intervened. I had no sooner joined the ship at Sliema when on a run ashore one evening I met a familiar face in the form of Tug Wilson who had been the Regulating Petty Officer at Halfar and had always attended the rum issue together with the duty Officer and myself. Tug was longer a RPO but had been reduced to the rank of Able Seaman following some problem concerning the ships registered mail. We had been drinking in the "Robin Hood" bar along the front and hired a horse drawn cab in order to proceed to yet another bar when it happened.

There was one almighty crash and I woke up covered in warm blood from the horse which was mercifully shot by a Maltese policeman and looked for Tug who had received a severe injury from the spoke of the wheel. We were both rushed to Floriana local hospital together with a CPO submariner also suffering from brain injuries who turned out to be the driver of the car which had run into us. Tug's injuries were fatal and he died along side me in Floriana hospital whereas I was transferred to Bghi the Naval Hospital. My only injuries comprised of a broken shoulder blade and a chipped hip nothing too serious thank goodness.

In the mean time HMS Vigo had set sail and I was told later the crew had kindly held a collection on board for me thinking I was dead little realising I was now at Ricasoli waiting Vigo's return to rejoin my ship.



HMS Vigo returned to Malta in October 1951 and as part of showing the Flag we sailed to Marmaris in Turkey where we held our annual regatta. Now being physically fit and with my Ganges training I was made stroke oar in the racing whalers crew representing Vigo. We fancied our chance of winning having trained over many weeks despite the handicap of having a CPO coxswain who weighed over seventeen stones. At the start all ready to show off our famous racing start who should appear but HRH Phillip in a fast skiff creating a large bow wave hindering our chances of winning. What our coxswain called him doesn't bear repeating but HRH just waved and grinned!

HMS Vigo was required to take its turn of duty in the gulf of Aqaba which usually lasted six weeks swinging around a buoy just off the port of Aqaba in Jordan which is situated between Saudi Arabia and Israel and in order to get there we called at Port Said to await convoy passage through the Suez canal. It was here that I first had occasion to meet "Jim Irish" claiming to be authorised Egyptian traders who would buy any old broken wrist watch and have it cleaned, repaired and ready to sell back to you on the return journey.

Passing through the canal in convoy (the bi-pass not yet being completed ) we stopped at Ismailia to allow other ships to pass and observed that things were beginning to change politically what with Egypt tearing up the 1936 Suez treaty and large numbers of British soldiers everywhere mostly shouting at us "Get your knees brown" for which we got our sweet revenge by shouting "Were going home" when returning.



Aqaba itself held little attraction for us and we spent most of our trips ashore carefully swimming within a restricted small beach with the Arab Legion throwing in a hand grenade occasionally to deter the sharks. Being a Muslim state there was no alcohol so in order to quench our thirsts we frequented the Army camp and were made welcome at the RASC canteen where we drank countless quantities of McEwen's red label. They in turn came aboard and made a quick dash for our iced water machines making a change from not having to rely on hanging canvas bags outside their tents overnight for cold water.

The Gulf of Aqaba was abundant with sharks all hungry for food in particular from ships waste and were all clearly visible from the ships deck. It appears just prior to our arrival a little Arab boy had lost his leg swimming in these waters so we decided on some sort of payback by attempting to capture one of these



creatures which we achieved by the use of a long wire cable attached with a large meat hook baited with an enormous piece of liver which as you can see did the trick.

The strength of these animals has to been seen to be believed as the creature even after having received several rounds from a Lanchester was still alive some hours later.

Our tour of duty over in March 1952 we returned to Devonport where once again I entered HMS Drake for long leave. After several months strolling through barracks one day I happened to bump into my old CPO coxswain from Vigo who suggested I should take the forthcoming Petty Officers examination before the Xmas leave period which I reluctantly did and proceeded home on leave.

Returning from Xmas leave I was informed that I had been successful in passing professionally for Supply Petty Officer and was dispatched to HMS Raleigh at Torpoint to attend a power of command course. This involved climbing a ten foot wall, crawling through barbed wire, , firing six shots from a .38 service revolver and shooting at a target using a 303 Lee Enfield rifle from various distances.

After years of watching fast gun draws in cowboy films at the Cinema I realised I would have reached Boothill at an early date not being able to hit a barn door at twenty feet with my revolver.



Having successfully completed my power of command course at Raleigh I was presented to the Commodore at Drake to be made officially a Supply Petty Officer backdated to November 1953 who having checked through all my Divisional officers reports found the only critical entry of my entire service life which read “ very good LSA.. has occasional bouts of laziness” made a point of asking me if I had now got over them.

With my new brass buttons and double anchors on my arm I moved myself into the Petty Officers block only to discover that in true naval fashion I was detailed to wake the hands in the same mess I had just vacated, you can imagine the welcome I received from my old messmates that morning.



As a SPO(V) I was available for transfer to any ship within Devonport port division and it came as a shock to discover I had been drafted to HMS Termagent probably due to my Destroyer training and even more surprised when I realised it was once again the target ship for the 3rd submarine squadron based at Rothesay in Scotland. On arrival in Rothesay very little about the place had changed except that we now came under the control of the submarine parent ship “Adamant” as opposed to the old “Montclair”

Once again we were back to the same old routine sailing up and down the Clyde estuary doing our runs trying hard to avoid submarines torpedoes and returning most evenings to harbour allowing the crew to taste the delights of the Rothesay night life which could not possibly compare with Devonport where one never returned to the ship sober without first sampling one of Ivor Dooney’s hot pasties outside the Albert gate.

A typical run ashore featuring myself, the PO cook and a few of the lads enjoying a few beers down at the Harbour Bar. The most popular drink at that time was called “Wee Dump” which although it came in a small bottle and tasted like barley wine was pretty potent.



As I did no watch keeping on board unlike the majority of the crew I usually volunteered for Shore patrol duties with three able seamen at my side all dressed in white belts and gaiters complete with night sticks. We were responsible for making sure all liberty men were well behaved ashore, ensuring that the NAAFI club was closed at the specific time and checking the local police cells to make sure any naval occupants returned safely to their ship.

A rare break from the Clyde was a trip to Rotterdam with HMS Adamant together with several boats where the crews set up a new world record in drinking Heinekin lager and scoffing down huge amounts of Gouda cheese at the brewery in Scheidam.



Back at Rothesay I was spending almost every weekend at Renfrew to visit Isabel who I had met at a dance one day in Dunoon. Things were getting pretty serious between us so each Friday I would catch the ferry to Wemyss Bay to get the Glasgow train.



With my time in the service coming to a close I had to make a big decision of whether to sign on for a naval pension possibly as a CPO(V) or face the great unknown in civilian life.

After a great deal of thought and having very much enjoyed my time in the service I decided to decline the offer and chance my luck on the great wide world so on my twenty fifth birthday January 13th 1956 I left the Navy and was placed on five years emergency reserve.

I have written this short history of my Naval service for the benefit of my own family and trust they may find it interesting (at least some parts) but the facts and details contained within the documents actually happened and are true.