Joining Up

In March 1924 I went to the Royal Navy and Royal Marines recruiting office in Deansgate, Manchester, and offered myself as a recruit for the Royal Marines.

After a very stiff medical examination two of us out of half a dozen or so hopefuls who had presented themselves were accepted. At that time the supply of would-be recruits exceeded the demand so really the recruiting officers could afford to be very selective and we considered ourselves fortunate.

My companion was an ex-driver of a Foden steam wagon who had just scraped into the corps by being a few weeks under the upper age limit of 28 and had a rather unusual name of Cumberbatch. I had just scraped in by being a few weeks over the lower age limit of 17.

Sometime in the early evening of March 10 the two of us arrived at Deal where a sergeant met us at the station to take us to the Depot. He took us first to the South barracks canteen for a meal and after that over to North barracks to the reception room. This was then H9 a room at the top of H block. We were the first two members of a new squad so the 20 or so beds in the room were not occupied except for one bed in the

corner and we wondered whose it could be.

At about 10 o'clock we found out when a three badge old soldier came in obviously from the wet canteen and told us he was the trained soldier in charge of the reception room. Here was lesson number one in corps tradition that the old soldier always had the corner bed.

Almost the first thing he asked asked was what we intended doing with our civilian clothes when we received our uniforms and I readily fell in with his suggestion that he should buy mine for a few shillings. Of course on my first day of service I had never heard of conduct to the prejudice of good order and Naval discipline but there is no doubt the old soldier was guilty of it. He never seemed to lack beer money so it would appear that his secondhand clothes business was profitable.

H9 barrack room was exactly the same as the scores of other rooms at the Depot -- big, bare and dismal. In each were about 20 beds ranged around the four walls, the beds iron-framed with steel slats and sheet steel backs. When made up for daily inspection the front half was rolled away under the back half and made a fairly comfortable seat.

Each bed had a donkey's breakfast -- a straw-filled mattress and a straw-filled pillow. When made up for inspection, the palliases had to be folded into three, with the pillow in the fold, and the whole lot strapped up to the back of the bed. Three white blankets, one brown rug and a pair of sheets completed the bedding. For inspection these were arranged on top of the folded palliases so that each blanket and each sheet showed three falls to the front, with the sheets in the middle. The finished job looked rather like a section cut from a flat and Swiss roll.

Behind each bed was a shelf of steel slaps, under the shelf three iron pegs, and under the pegs a rifle rack. The floor was bare wood, scrubbed daily, with straight black lines of pitch seams running the length of the room, excellent marks on which to line up the front legs of the beds and the toecaps of the boots and canvas slippers under the beds.

The room furnishings were a trestle table, scrubbed word, two trestle stools, scrubbed word, and a huge cast-iron coal bunce, which must have weighed two hundredweight. Cast into the side of this particular item was the emblem VR 1851. In the summer months, when the bunces were out of use, they were stood up on end, the outside polished with Zebra grate black polish and the insides whitewashed.

Each recruit stayed in the reception room for three or four days until he had been issued with his kit and each day would see two or three new arrivals. Presently there arrived a youngster from Hull who could knock out a pretty good tune on the canteen piano. A year later when the squad had moved up to Eastney he transferred to the Royal Marines band. He became K A McLean, director of music, Royal Marines.,

On our second day we were taken to the paymaster's office in South barracks and given a 10 shilling (50p) advance of pay. This we thought a very handsome gesture but the next call was to the NAAFI and with the money we had to buy three cakes of Blanco (one white, one green one brown), a tin of cherry blossom shoe polish and a tin of old-fashioned boot blacking, bluebell metal polish, a button stick, a walking-out cane (swagger stick) and a ditty bag.

The blacking was the official way of getting a polish on greasy boots, but the unofficial way, was to sprinkle the boots with the Bluebell and then set light to them. A ditty box was an optional purchase which most of us fancied and we spent hours carving "Per Mare Per Terram" on the lid and filling the carving with red ceiling wax. Later on we found a much more

exciting and illegal way to decorate the boxes. It meant stealing a round of 303, removing the bullet and shaking the cordite out of the brass cylinder. Cordite was made in sticks, or cords, hence the name, of about needle thickness. The cordite was laid on a previously pencilled design on the lid, the end of the stick touched with a light and a fierce flame quickly ran around the cordite leaving the design neatly scorched into the wood. Fortunately none of us was ever caught at this very dubious practice.

Our next visit was to the quartermaster's store in East barracks, to be kitted up. Among the items listed under equipment was the complete set of webbing to make up a marching order, and we now knew why we had bought green Blanco. Next an issue of white buff equipment -- belts, frog, two pouches, and a rifle sling --- and we knew the reason at once for the white Blanco, and finally a pair of long naval tight leggings.

For some reason these had to be Blancoed brown, so with those three colours we were good customers of Joseph Pickering the Blanco manufacturers. Unfortunately the leggings, a comfortable and practical item, were withdrawn after about six months and the uncomfortable puttee issued.

We wore khaki service dress only for musketry and

field training so the puttees were in use for quite short periods and very few of us mastered the art of winding a neat puttee around our legs.

At about this time the peakless Broderick hat was being replaced with a new style hat with a peak. We preferred the Broderick. It was much more comfortable. Happily the dark grey overcoat was still being issued and, worn over the blue uniform, looked very smart, much more so than the ugly khaki coats which came into use a few years later.

The hats as issued were fitted with a bamboo cane grommet to stiffen the brim. These made the hats look clumsy so to smarten them up we would change the cane for a wire grommet, only to be told to change back again because if we got near to a ship's compass the magnetic effects of the wire would cause a change in compass deviation. In fact in nearly 10 years aboard HMS ships I never once stood on or near that holy of holies, the compass platform. Our official issue of clothing included three very thick very rough flannel shirts, three coarse linen blue and grey striped shirts, three pairs of long wool drawers -- known then, as now, as dung hampers -- and three pairs of army grey socks. The flannel shirt had always to be worn under the linen shirt as bayonet fighting drills were always done in shirt sleeves, and PT with tunic and shirts

removed showing only the flannel shirt. As both these drills were done daily and we had to be properly dressed for each we had to wear both shirts.

Dressed in our grey overcoats, peakless hats and long leggings we somewhat resembled the 1914 - 1918 German infantry man.

Towards the end of the first week about a dozen of us were assembled. All had been kitted up, well-dressed in uniform, and were considered presentable enough to be taken to the office of the colonel commandant for swearing-in. Before seeing the commandant we were each told what to say in reply to the question "Why did you decide to join the royal marines? " Some were told to say, "To improve my prospects, " others to say, "To travel the world" and so on. In my own case the truth would have been, "Because I was hard up, sir," but I had to say the set pieces given to me even though I had been very hard up on an apprentice wage of just under a pound a week. The rate of pay on enlistment was then three shillings (15p) per day so £1.5p a week with no commitments was wealth! At that time the colonel commandant was LST Halliday VC who had earned his decoration at the Pekin legation in 1900 and in later years I spent a four day leave in the legation and was able to visit the exact spot where this action took place.

Colonel commandant as a title has now been dropped but in 1924 each of the three headquarter divisions and the depot knew their commanding officers by that title. How we sweated on parade with that lot under our blue serge tunics.

Fortunately there were no drill movements which required us to remove our trousers so we did buy short thin underpants to wear in place of the official dung hampers. The old-style cutthroat razor was still standard issue and had to be laid out at kit inspection even though everybody used the safety razor.

Other clothing included three blue serge tunics, one pair of red striped trousers, worn for guard duties, and two pairs of plain serge trousers for everyday drills. Fatigue dress was a blue boiler suit. Altogether the kit filled a large brown canvas kitbag and a small white one which was known as a sea service kit bag. Why, I don't know, because we took both to sea with us.

At that time each division -- Chatham, Plymouth and Portsmouth -- and the depot had its own tailor's shops each employing about a dozen full-time tailors making all the uniforms required. The old stocks of Royal Marine Artillery buttons were being used up and some of the tunics issued to us had these buttons.

Anyone who got one of those considered himself one up on those who hadn't.

Every item of kit was of top quality, and more than 60 years later (1994) I still have in daily use my 1924 issue of two boot brushes, clothes brush and hairbrush.

We had now been at the Depot about a week. There were a dozen or more of us so we started a little preliminary squad drill not on the parade ground but in the North barracks drill shed, out of sight, and here for the first time we met the adjutant Captain Webber. Over the next nine months we came to like and to respect and admire him -- an officer and a gentleman in every respect. The parade Sergeant Major Chant was somewhat rotund so inevitably was "Tubby Chant" a kindly and avuncular sort who tried to hide his real self by being fiercely militaristic on parade. At any one time there were 10 squads under training with a sergeant MTI in charge of each -- all of them very strict and very fair. I never once knew our squad instructor to descend to sarcasm and he seldom swore -- he seemed typical of the parade ground staff. There was one odd sort of rank on the staff, perhaps there still is, a QMS , instructor of infantry drill. . It was not a convenient title for everyday use so we had to address him as "first drill ."

By early April the 93rd squad had formed and we began five solid months of square bashing. Three-rank drill was not then in vogue. We fell-in into ranks and formed fours to march off. So for 20 weeks we did turns on wheels, left and right forms, rifle drill by numbers, rifle drill judging your own time, riots drill, ceremonial drill, stick drills -- in fact the whole drill book. Stick drill had a slightly comic flavour. It was drilled with our little swagger cane, marching around the parade ground with the cane held between forefinger and thumb parallel with the ground. Then would come the order, "As an orderly with a message, halt ". At this we halted, placed the cane under the left arm, saluted, and 30 voices would sing out in unison, "Message for you, Sah!" Another salute, cane back to right hand, and march off.

A glance at the swagger cane showed which HQ division the recruit would eventually go to. The Chatham men had one silver ring, the Plymouth men had two and the Portsmouth men had three. We had been allowed to choose our HQ division when sworn in. Our kitbags had the same ring marks in black paint. After eight weeks we were considered to be sufficiently trained to do barrack guard so about every 10th day the squad provided the nine men required for

the two posts, one on the North barracks guard room, one on South barracks pay office. Guard duties were detested by all of us: The parade in full marching order at 09:00 hours, the boring two-hour spells on sentry go and the discomfort of sleeping fully dressed and equipped with boots on. We loathed it all.

Actually the two posts required eight men; the ninth was guard orderly. The best turned out man was selected when the guard paraded and was appointed orderly. There was keen competition for this as there were very solid advantages attached to the job. On arrival at the guard room, the orderly disposed of all his equipment except belt and bayonet. He did not do any sentry duties so had an almost uninterrupted night's sleep. The officer of the day did his visiting round at about 02:00 hours. He always tried to wheedle the sentry's rifle away from him but even we recruits knew better than to fall for that one.

Whilst the unlucky nine did their guard the remainder of the squad did barrack fatigues. The most popular of these was the ginger pop factory fatigue. The depot made its own ginger pop with the factory in North barracks under the supervision of a marine pensioner. He would tell us that we could drink as much as we liked while working on the premises but none must be taken away but fatigue dress being a loosefitting

boiler suit, it was easy to secrete as many as half a dozen bottles in the clothing. The man who had done a day in the pop factory and did not provide his roommates with a free booze up was considered a slow sort of chap.The bottles were the old-fashioned type with glass marble stoppers. Sometimes the empties were surreptitiously returned to the canteen, sometimes put under other rubbish in the dustbins. There must be several hundreds of them buried in the council refuse tip at Deal. Lately I have seen similar bottles in the antique shops priced at £2 each.

The least popular fatigue was coaling the barrack rooms, the galleys, the canteens etc which were all coal-burning. The fuel was delivered in a six man power hand cart and at the coal yard we shovelled coal into bunces, circular galvanised tubs holding about a half-hundredweight each and then loading up the handcart with about a dozen bunces and pushing the cart to wherever the coal was needed.
The barrack rooms were easily the most difficult to coal, often involving a climb up two flights of stairs -- hard and dirty work. In addition to this day of guard and fatigues, about every 10th day we would do a before-breakfast fatigue.

For this we paraded at 06:15 hours in fatigue dress to be detailed for such jobs as canteen, or commandant's

office, orderly room etc. There, under the supervision of an old soldier, we would wipe over the corticene floor. The golden rule seemed to be that if it was wet, it must be clean, so a BB seldom lasted more than 15 minutes except for those detailed for galley fatigue where he cooks were entitled to keep their BB men until 0700 hours and often did so, washing up huge stacks of greasy tins. There was one small perk attached to a galley fatigue – an early morning basin of tea with unlimited sugar. We indulged in none of your fancy drawing-room tricks of drinking from cups – basins were the standard issue.

At about the third month we did a swimming test. To pass we were required to swim two lengths of the bath and then remain afloat for three minutes while fully-dressed. For this purpose about a dozen old seamen's suits were kept at the swimming bath. We had the experience of the more senior squads to guide us and knew that the thing to do was to be pretend to be unable to swim as each afternoon when the instructor would order "non-swimmers fall out" and they would march off for swimming instruction whilst the remainder of the squad sweated it out on parade. Remember, it was high summer. Naturally the PTI swimming instructors knew this Dodge as well as we did and after a few lessons could easily pick out the artful dodgers from the genuine nonswimmers.

Then the artful ones would be ordered to jump into the deep end. When in deep water it is difficult to put on a show of pretending to be a non-swimmer so we were soon sorted out but no matter, we had got in a few extra trips to the pool.

On passing the test we were given a swimming certificate which stated that "this certifies that so-and-so is able to swim." We all thought it a great joke to insert after the word "swim " the words "the channel " and as nobody in authority ever asked to see the certificate once it was issued, we had our joke and suffered no consequences.

We were of course subject to all the awesome provisions of KR & AI but generally our misdemeanours were small and the punishments correspondingly light. Twenty weeks of square bashing was very boring so a frequent offence was inattention on parade, the usual award for which would be one hour's extra drilling from 17:00 hours to 18:00 hours. A slightly more serious offence would merit one hours pack drill. Much depended on the NCO who was in charge of the punishment – the lenient ones would permit the offender to just march up-and-down the parade, with rifle comfortably at the trail or shoulder, but the martinet would insist on the slope for most of the hour and with the bayonet fixed

that would really cramp the arm muscles.
Thus an offence on parade was met with punishment on parade, but an offence within the company would be punished with extra work: for example dusty boots under the bed at morning barrack room inspection would merit one hour's extra work. The miscreant who earned himself "confined to barracks " had a long and busy day. He had to report to the guard room every time the bugle sounded "defaulters" and this was every hour during the evening and Saturday afternoons and Sundays and every day except Sunday did one hour's pack drill 17:00 hours to 18:00 hours. The CB man who lived in South barracks was worst off. He had a fairly lengthy walk to the guard room in North barracks to answer to his name.

Although the main parade on the barrack square was not until 09:00 hours, there was each morning at 08:15 hours a company parade. Each company fell in outside its own company block and every day we paraded in one of the various combinations that could be made up from our webbing equipment – one morning in marching order, the next in battle order, or skirmishing order, or ceremonial order – this last one wearing our white buff equipment. Then at 08:45 hours there was a quick scuffle back to the barrack room to get into "drill order " for the 9 o'clock parade. For a marching order the contents of the pack were:

greatcoat, socks, towel, soap, canvas slippers, flannel shirt, clothes brush and billycan. Then the groundsheet was folded into the flap of the pack and finally the tin hat was strapped onto the outside. It was difficult to make a neat square pack with that amount of gear inside it and as the use of boards was not permitted we would often leave out one of the items to so as to reduce the bulges. This was foolish as it was almost a certainty that the company commander would order "left turn and undo each other's pack." Then the offenders would be on parade again at 17:00 hours doing an extra parade in marching order. There was one odd little item we had in our kit -- a black leather knee pad to strap around the right knee. Often a drill movement required us to drop down onto one knee and fire an imaginary five rounds over imaginary corn growing waist high on the parade

A kit muster came about every three weeks. If only one or two individuals were to muster it could be laid out in the barrack room but if the whole room were mustering at the one and same time then the lot had to be carried into the drill shed and laid out there. With one thing and another we would start kit and equipment cleaning immediately after tea at about 17:00 hours and sometimes not be finished until 21:00 hours.

We did not have to bother about breaking off for supper because there were not any suppers until we had been in the Depot for five months or so and I have often wondered if I was responsible for the introduction of that meal.

The custom then was that each company set aside a ground floor barrack room, furnished it with trestle tables and stools and called it the "dining hall" with an old soldier attendant in charge. Each evening after tea, the dining hall was cleared up and when we recruits has shoved off out of the way the old soldier placed on the table a couple of loaves and a newly filled margarine dish all ready for the next day's breakfast.

One evening two or three of us youngsters put our heads together and at teatime make sure that the window catch was released. Then at about 8 o'clock, we made our way to the dining hall. It was decided that I should go through the window and pass the loot out to the others waiting outside. Suddenly there was a quick scamper of feet – my mates making a strategic withdrawal! Framed in the window was Lofty the 6'6" tall DMF. I could not escape through the door because that was locked. I could only clamber through the window into the arms of Lofty.

We marched off to the guardroom where presently I saw the officer of the day. He simply said, "Company commanders report." The next day I told the commander that I was hungry and had no money to buy food from the canteen. He said "stand over." Normally this meant that a few more enquiries would be made after which I would expect to appear again and be awarded punishment. In fact I never heard another word on the matter and shortly after this the issue of a supper meal started. Never anything cooked -- always bread and marge and such things as cheese, tinned salmon, sardines or corned dog (beef) with a basin of pusser's "ki" (cocoa).

A universally detested job was bed filling. This was done about every three months, one company at a time.

On the appointed morning the company concerned was called half an hour before reveille and then each man took his straw mattress and pillow to the store yard where the old straw was empty out into a corner. The old mattress and pillow covers were exchanged for clean ones which were filled with clean straw. It always paid to really pack the straw in as tightly and as hard as possible even though this meant sleeping for a week or a roly-poly of straw. After that it flattened out to a good thick mattress. On the other

hand the man who did not bother to pack a tight mattress would find that after a week he was sleeping on almost bare bed irons . On returning to the barrack room we then got busy with needle and thread stitching up our "donkey's breakfasts."
A few weeks after joining we were marched up to the Depot school and given the test for the third class certificate of education and of the 30 or so men in the squad only seven passed this test and about half a dozen men had to have special tuition in reading and writing. After that we had one hour each week at school for the whole of the 20 weeks that we spent square bashing. The schoolmaster at that time was WC Gray, who lived in a house attached to the school and had a pretty little three year old daughter whom we used to spoil with bits of chocolate. In 1942 at the camp on Dalditch Common, was a clerical Wren Gray – the same girl who clearly remembered the chocolate she used to get.

Eventually came the day when the squad paraded before the adjutant to "pass off ". For about an hour we went through our paces showing off all the drill movements we had learned. The adjutant announced his satisfaction, presented his five shilling prize for the Best Kept Notebook (to me) and so the 93rd squad finished it is five months on the Barrack Square.

The same afternoon we marched over to the QM's store to be issued with a pair of sea service boots ready for the next stage of training. These boots were the same as the two pairs we already had except that the soles and heels were plain leather with no studs or steel tips. We'd had a belly full of "per terram" and now for a month we were to have a small taste of "per mare ".

Before that however we had our 10 days leave that was granted to all squads on passing off parade. Very few of us had bothered much about going into town on evening leave; our evenings up to now had been fully occupied with Blanco and Bluebell.

The next phase commenced after the leave and it was known as a repository course. At that time the Marines had a boat shed on the seafront with a 12-oar Naval cutter. The PTI staff were in charge of this part of our training which started with us all being lined up along a ridge wire at breast height on which we had to tie eight or nine of the more simple knots, bends and hitches with some interesting instruction on the correct names and uses of the ropes and hawsers used generally in the Royal Navy.

Very soon we talked knowingly about manila hemp, grease lines, tarred hemp, spun yarn and so forth. Nor

were we ever to be so wicked as to think of stealing any lines and hemp as the coloured strands that ran through them made them easily identifiable as Admiralty property. Gradually we learned all sorts of intriguing new words – fluke, shank, pintle, gadget, loom, blade, strake, clinker, carvel till long before the course was finished we all thought we were real Jack Tars. Then came the boat pulling and to the uninitiated a cutter's oar is a cumbersome thing to handle but we mostly made a fair job of it.

Although we were taught boat pulling, we did not get any instruction in sailing and while we were also taught how to splice, we were not shown how to point and graft. This was a little odd really as when we got to a ship the very first thing we had to do was to point and graft the head and foot lanyards and lashings of our hammocks. It had to be done so we soon learned how to do it. For the month that the repository course lasted we took no part in the main parade. We had no 08:15 hours company parade and of course we wore no equipment so escaped the routine of Blanco and Bluebell. Add to this the fact that it was summertime, so we were in short sleeves for most of the day and this made the period easily the most enjoyable of the time we spent at the Depot. In fact it seems that at this point was established the pattern that was to run through the next 12 years -- that mostly I disliked the

soldiering part of our life but was always interested in the sailoring part.

On parade I always did as much as was required to keep out of trouble, but not more, and fortunately all that I was required to do mostly was to follow the man in front of me unless I happened to be right hand man of the front rank which was not often. At the "fall-in" a little judicious shuffling would ensure that somebody else got to the marker first and would thus be right hand man.

As soon as the repository course finished it was back to the Blanco and Bluebell again for we immediately started the musketry course. For this we wore "battle order " -- haversack on the back, water bottle and entrenching tool and of course belt and ammunition pouches (always pronounced "pooches") and we dressed in our khaki service dress. Fortunately we still had our seamen's long canvas leggings as the abominable putties were still a little way in the future.

First thing on the Monday morning we marched to the armourer's shop to hand in our old drill purpose rifles and to be issued with new high velocity rifles -- and very proud we were with these splendid new weapons which we kept for the remainder of our service unless or until they developed a defect. Mine lasted about

seven years and with it I was lucky enough to pick up some very handy sums of prize-money and one or two cups and medals at the fleet rifle meetings. The Depot rifle range was at Kingsdown at the foot of the cliffs and even then was being threatened by the sea. Sometimes it could not be used at high tide and I believe that it was completely destroyed a few years later, the spot now being underwater.

However before we went to Kingsdown we spent a week on the fields in South barracks doing preliminary musketry with dummy bullets and a lot of practising of the 15 rounds rapid. Although this was a complete course there was no question of earning the marksman's 10 shillings as officially it was still a preliminary course. We had to wait until the spring of 1925 before we did the training soldiers course and then the good shots who scored 90 or more out of a possible 120 could decorate their sleeves with the crossed rifles of the marksman.

For every point over 90 an extra penny was paid.

On this preliminary course we were briefly introduced to the Vickers machine gun but never fired it. However we did get a pretty good grounding in the Lewis light machine gun. We were trained to fire this

gun in bursts of no more than five rounds at a time. More than that and the gun started to walk away on its front legs and on the whole it seemed that the Lewis gun was not a very reliable weapon as it tended to jam in all sorts of the unpredictable positions although generally a jam could be cleared by a quick "counter-rotate" of the magazine followed by pulling the cocking handle to the rear.

The man who handled the Lewis gun well during the musketry course was accorded the doubtful honour of acting as Lewis Gunner during the field training which followed the musketry. Doubtful, because he had to carry the gun all over the downs instead of a much lighter rifle. The 15 rounds rapid meant 15 aimed shots in 45 seconds. This always produced a blood blister on the palm of the hand and another on the side of the thumb, the two parts of the hand mostly used in the necessary quick bolt movements.

We were told that this famous rapid fire had in 1914 deceived the Germans into believing that almost every British infantry man was armed with a machine gun. The Lee Enfield was reputed to have a faster bolt action that any other in the world and the only one in which the bolt could be opened, closed and locked in one movement.

An attachment called a discharger cup converted the rifle into a miniature mortar. The cup was clamped onto the barrel and the rifle was held at about 45° angle to the ground with the trigger uppermost. A Ballistite cartridge was then put into the rifle breach and a Mills hand grenade dropped into the cup, the range being set by opening or closing a gas port. When fired, the cartridge pushed the grenade out to a maximum range of about 75 yards but there was more luck than judgement in dropping the grenade anywhere near the target area. It seems incredible that the 1924 discharger cup was almost identical to the one that was used with the Brown Bess Musket of 1717.

PT has not yet been mentioned but each day during our 20 weeks of square bashing the squad marched over to the gymnasium in South barracks for PT. Arriving at the gym we stripped down to our flannel shirts and trousers, removed our boots and from a heap of plimsolls tried to find a pair of the right size. Then we tucked our trouser legs into our army grey socks, removed our braces and put on a snake buckle belt, always being careful to see that the buckle was on the left hip.

Then followed a fast and furious half-hour of PT. One rather odd exercise was "marching with marked step

every third step." We went round and round the gym and we marched left-right plonk, right-left plonk' left-right plonk. It was, we were told, an exercise to improve coordination between brain and muscle. Another old favourite was "twice in each direction, upwards, forwards, sideways and downwards, arms stretched." Then about every 10 minutes or so, "three deep breaths with hands turning outwards in your own time commence." However sessions on the vaulting horse, the parallel bars and the wall bars soon had us in a sweat. The PTI's also taught fighting drill, a very rigid series of movements always the same point: Long point, followed by short point, followed by a jab, followed by butt strokes, one, two, three.

For bayonet fighting the gym had a collection of 40 old rifles and about half of these were of 1888 vintage. On the whole the PTI staff I remember as being sarcastic and spiteful and completely different from the parade ground staff.

As previously mentioned, each squad at the Depot consisted of about 30 recruits and on joining each man was permitted to choose his headquarters division -- Chatham, Plymouth or Portsmouth -- and it averaged out each division would get about one third of each squad. On completion of training at the Depot the

squad remained together and was transferred en masse to each headquarters division taking it in turns to receive a squad for naval gunnery training and the advanced musketry and field training courses. These three together would occupy the next six months.

It happened to be Eastney that received the 93rd squadron so as 1924 drew towards its close we enjoyed the fleeting glory of being the senior squad, the Kings squad.

At the final parade the adjutant made a farewell speech of which I remember only this: "You are, all of you, now physically fit. You have never been so fit before. You will never be so fit again ". Looking back over the last half century I can only say "how true, Sir, how true."

So, in December, 1924, the 93rd found itself at Eastney which up to 1923 had been the home of the blue Marines, the Royal Marine Artillery.

It was in 1804 that they RMA had been divided off from the RMLI because of disputes between the army and navy about the Manning of the heavy naval guns. Up to about 1830 however the RMA was a very small unit but in that year the Navy established it's gunnery school HMS Excellent and this perhaps saved it. They

were asked to provide the first instructors for training the men of Excellent. Even so it was not until the Crimean war that the RMA was expanded into a large force, completely independent of the RMLI.

When we arrived at Eastney there was still a very strong flavour of the blues about the place and we first became aware of the extent of the animosity that had existed between the blues and reds (ie RMLI). A story that I was to hear in a dozen different settings, different men, different ships, but always
But always the same theme: how an argument started between a red and blue Marine, developed into a fight, and the sturdy little red smashed up the big useless bastard of a blue (red version) or alternatively the blue picked up the little twit of a red by his collar and put his head into the gash bunce (blue version). Generally the Blues were around 5 ft10ins to 6ft in height and the Reds say around 5'6" and the blues mostly served aboard the capital ships which carried the larger guns.

Whilst we were at Eastleigh several ships paid off and the blues came into barracks still wearing the "flaming bomb" badges whilst the Reds still had their "globe and laurel" insignia. Almost all the old soldiers wore the ribbons of the First World War medals and many were wearing up to as many as eight or nine ribbons

including foreign decorations. At that time of course most of the men doing a 12 year engagement had been right through the 1914-1918 war.

One of the yarns told us by the old soldiers was that Eastney barracks was an exact replica of a barracks in Potsdam, the German garrison town near Berlin, and that the RMA were permitted to copy the design because of the splendid impression they had made on German nobility who had visited and inspected the RMA on parade. The barracks was built in 1864 and as one approached the main gate and caught sight of the clock in its tower it certainly gave the impression of being of German design.The old soldiers were a hard drinking a lot, spending most of the evenings in the wet canteen or in the pubs of Eastney. There was a certain pub a few hundred yards from the main Barrack gate where they reckoned they could always get advanced information about the ships due to commission or pay off and that the pub always knew about this before the drafting office.

At the Depot we of the 93rd squad had considered ourselves to be really something when we obtained at the status of senior guard, the Kings guard; now at Eastney we were relegated to the rank of mere sprogs still wet behind the ears and of course among so many old soldiers that is exactly what we were.

In retrospect Deal seemed a cosy cosy place compared with Eastney. Even at Deal we could nearly always sneak an extra half hour in bed after the Bugler had sounded reveille but not so at Eastleigh. We turned out on the first note of the Bugle or else – and at once all the windows had to be flung wide open. As the barrack rooms faced the Solent they were often filled with fog and mist, making everything damp and cold.

Eastney had progress in one small way – the floors were Corticene covered, not bare boards, as at Deal. They were of course thoroughly soaked every morning by scrubbing. The rooms were of the same large size as those at Deal and never seemed to be warm. There was an open coal fire at one end which made little difference to the temperature and which we were forbidden to light until the end of the afternoon parade. There was the usual furniture – two trestle tables and four trestle stools – nothing else. As atDeal, each company set aside a ground floor barrack room as a dining hall. The cookhouse was about 50 yards away and to get there at the cook of the mess had to walk in the open carrying the dishes of food. This insured that by the time they had got the food to the mess and shared it out onto cold plates it was stone cold and most unpalatable. The messing was of the same low standard as at Deal and Saturday's

dinner was still the disgusting "sea pie.""

A minor mystery regarding Eastney was widely used the letters A,E,I,N for the four companies instead of the more usual ABCD. I have never known the answer.

The outstanding character at Eastleigh at the time was the redoubtable Charlie Ellis. His name and fame had spread far beyond Eastney for we had heard of him while we were at the Depot. He was the parade Sergeant Major, an ex-Blue, and a dynamo of energy.

One story told of him was that he was the only man in the history of the RMA to have been promoted from Gunner to Sergeant in one jump and that he was the only one to have used his rifle at drill with such gusto that the rifle butt broke off. His great hobby in the evenings was training the Pompey tug-of-war team for Olympia and one day Charlie appeared on parade with a crêpe bandage around his neck. It was rumoured that on giving the command "Heave" to his tug of war team he had also given such a vigourous backward jerk of his head that he had strained his neck muscles.

His parade ground drill intrigued us youngsters from the Depot. We had been taught the drill book according to the RMLI whereas Charlie drilled RMA

fashion. On a left turn for instance the blue Marine always shot his right foot about 12 inches to the rear before bringing it up to the left and there was a difference in the hand movement when saluting but we quickly adapted to these and several other small variations. Like Sergeant Major Chant at the Depot, Charlie was a terror on parade but a Dutch uncle when off.

I came across him again in 1931 when I came into Chatham barracks from a foreign commission and he was Q.M.

General messing by then had been introduced with a central dining hall and he was in charge of messing. The meals were first class, plentiful in quantity and always piping hot. On arrival at Eastney barracks we plunged straight into our naval gunnery training and we found it a good change from the previous nine months of infantry training.

Now we paraded each day in loose order and marched off to the gun battery.There was one weekly exception to this. Each Monday afternoon every available man paraded for infantry drill -- the off duty cooks, the flunkies, the clerks and everybody who could be spared. This included of course we recruits doing our naval gunnery. Charlie must have loved his Monday

afternoons with practically battalion strength on file. Also at Eastney, as at the Depot, church parade was compulsory and every Sunday attracted a large crowds of spectators

The gunnery training was based on the director system which had been introduced into the Navy by Admiral Sir Percy Scott just prior to the 1914 war. Before that, each gun was laid and fired by its own gun-layer whose vision of the target was obscured by spray, funnel smoke and smoke from his own gun. To overcome this Sir Percy wanted all the guns controlled and fired by one man, placed up high, and forward of the funnels. This system was eventually adopted. In director firing it was not necessary for the grounds crew to see the target – only the director-layer up aloft needed to do that as also did the control officer who watched the splashes from the falling shot and ordered the necessary corrections.

At the gun, the gun-layer and trainer simply watched the dials in front of them. On the outer rim of the dials small red pointers ran around and the layer and trainer kept their black pointers aligned exactly with the red. To move the black pointers the layer and trainer had to use the handwheels ande the handwheels moved the gun. As long as the black and red pointers were aligned then the gun was aimed at the same target as

was the director-layer's sighting telescope. The director-layer was usually a warrant officer and as he moved his sight up and down so the red pointers at the gun moved. The same applied to the director-trainer. As he trained the director around, the red pointers at the gun were followed by the gun trainer. The heart of the system was the transmitting station (TS). Aboard the ships that carried RM bandsman, the TS was always their action station. Into the TS was fed all the information such as the range as measured by the rangefinders which had to be corrected for such things as speed and course of own ship, speed and course of target, direction and speed of wind, atmospheric pressure and even the temperature of the magazine which affected the propulsive power of the cordite.

All this activity in the TS area was known as the plot and the final result of the plot was transmitted to the director in the shape of range and deflection. Of course many small errors could and did creep in and these were corrected by the control officer in the control top. He could see the shots falling short or going over the target and would order ""up 600" or "down 400" or whatever was necessary. The ultimate aim was to straddle the target.

At first glance it would seem that not much training was necessary to simply chase a red pointer to the

black one but of course at any moment the electrical circuits could fail or the gun could missfire. Then the two key men at the gun -- the gun layer and the breach worker -- had to know exactly what to do.

In the gun battery, at drill, the sergeant gunnery instructor had a master switch by means of which he could simulate various failures by putting different circuits out of action. The breach worker watched the

The breach worker watched the tell-tale circuit lights on the gun and on a misfire reported to the gun-layer which circuit was at fault. He would then order the correct remedial action. The sergeant GI would switch out the circuits one by one until at last the gun would be in gun-layer control -- that is, the GL was actually using the pistol grip at the gun, whilst observing his own fall of shot, making his own shooting corrections and ordering his own range corrections. Meanwhile the breach worker would have unshipped the electrical firing lock and substituted a percussion firing lock. If that system went wrong then there was nothing more to be done -- the gun was out of action!

The 6 inch projectile weighed 100 lbs and was manhandled all the way from the shell room -- no hydraulics at all. The rammer number had to be a fairly muscular man because he had to ram home the

projectile hard enough to ensure that the copper driving band was biting into the rifling of the barrel. His rammer looked very much like a mop with a bronze disc at the end (bronze because it does not spark) and the mop part of it was used to sponge over the breech with water in case any fragments of burning silk were left over from the previous round. The cordite charges about 18 inches long were wrapped in silk. As the gun trained round, the rammer number had to move his tub of water around so as always to be behind the breech of the gun. A 6 inch gun needed a crew of nine and number nine was usually the youngest and least experienced of the crew. He only had to bawl out the orders coming through his headphones which would be the orders in initiating a firing run something like this, "bearing green 90, a target. A cruiser. Follow director. All guns load, load, load." As soon as the guns were loaded the breach workers made their "interceptor switches." This made the "gun read" lamps to burn in the director tower. The director gunner would then ring his fire gong, indicating that he would fire at any moment. These few seconds between the gong and the actual firing were always very tense but all nervousness would disappear as soon as the first round was fired. However these last few remarks applied to a ship. There was no firing at the gun battery. As well as gun drills there were lectures, all interesting. We were

required to have a fairly detailed knowledge of the mechanism of the gun, particularly the recoil system and the breech mechanism. We were lectured on the theory of ballistics, the properties of various explosives and the identification marks on projectiles. In a word the three months at the gun battery gave us a very thorough training in naval gunnery, both practical and theoretical. However we had not yet finished with naval guns as we now marched each day to the dockyard to the old monitor "Marshall Sault" for 15 inch turret drills. This was great stuff, all power driven mechanism necessary to move around the 15 inch projectiles weighing the best part of a ton. A 15 inch turret was a noisy place what with the main cage rattling up the trunk with its heavy load of projectiles, the rammer driving into the breach by hydraulic pressure and the pumps crashing away in the machinery space. We really had to shout to be heard. I never was in the grand house of a 15 inch turret when it was fired but was in the turrets of the county class cruisers with 8 inch guns and in the crews of 6 inch and 4 inch guns. The 6 inch and 8 inch when fired were not so very hard on the ears but the 4 inch AA gun was a real terror with a wicked crack that almost split the eardrums. After the 15 inch turret drills we had two days out in the Solent aboard a drifter and each of us in turn took on the gunlayer's job, firing about 30 rounds at a towed target but what

the calibre of the gun was I cannot remember. It was all good interesting stuff and, being interested, I passed out of gunnery with a high number of points, confirming what I had thought after doing the repository course at Deal: that the "per mare" was good and the "per terraam" not so good.

We now put away our blue suits and for the next two months wore our khaki service dress. Meanwhile the canvas leggings had been withdrawn and the dreadful putties issued. Not many of us acquired the art of wearing these things -- either winding them too tight so that the circulation was restricted or else too loose so that after marching for half an hour they had slipped down around our ankles. Anyway off we went to Browndown for a month of field training, followed by three weeks musketry which was carried out at Eastney on the range between Eastney barracks and Port Cumberland

There are no clear memories of these last weeks at Eastney except qualifying as a marksman, thereby

earning 10 shillings (50p) . Also around this time our pay increased from 3 to 4 shillings (20p) per day.

So by late June, all our training done, the 93rd squad split up. Those who had opted for the Pompey division remained at Eastney. The Plymouth men went off to Guz. And 10 of us came to Chatham.

During the 1920s the three divisions had difficulty in finding enough marines to form attachments for the ships of the RN so we were more than welcome to the drafting officer.

Within a week we were all under orders for embarkation. Luckily three of us were detailed for HMS Const a light cruiser built in 1916. She was commissioning for the Americas and West Indies Station. Lucky for us because service in a big ship was not very popular and Constance was a small ship by any standards (3,750 tons). In fact we were doubly fortunate because as well as a small ship we were going to the most popular of naval stations.

From the date of being placed on the orders for embarkation the detachment became a unit in its own right. We fell in together, were addressed as detachment and had no dealings with the main grades. We were far too busy doing field officers runs. This

meant a minute inspection of kit, equipment and arms and making good any small defects or deficiencies as well as several visits to the sick bay for inoculations and vaccinations and of course the 10 days draft leave.

On the day of commissioning we put our kit in the drill shed for transport to the dockyard. Then at 09:00 hours the detachment paraded in marching order, and within a few minutes marched out of the main gate headed by the divisional band playing the regimental March. It would be 2.5 years before we marched in again. That was then the normal length of a foreign commission although later on I did a three years and five months commission on the China station and altogether did nine years afloat out of my 12 year engagement. Add to this nine years the 1.5 years under recruit training and there is just 1.5 years left in which to do an advanced gunnery course and work in the commissioning leave and the paying off leave. This underlines the remarks about the difficulty of finding the men for sea duty, so our life was very much more "per mare" than "per terram."

So in little more than a month after completing our training we were at sea en route for Bermuda via Newfoundland and Quebec. For most of us we experienced our first and last bouts of seasickness and

we were heartily wishing ourselves back in Chatham or even Pompey. When we arrived at Bermuda all the other ships, Calcutta, Cape Town and Curlew, and the two coal burning soups Valerian and Wisteria were away cruising around.

The America and West Indies cover a vast area roughly half of the Atlantic Ocean and half of the Pacific ocean -- or about one third of the oceans of the world -- so the cruisers did a good deal of seatime.

Constance carried a very small detachment of Marines -- about 26 -- of whom eight were watch keepers (four gangway, four on the keyboard) about 12 WRA's and the remaining half dozen were employed as ship's watch lamp trimmer, 6 inch gun sweepers, domestic sweepers and one Sergeants mess man. This left only one marine for ship duties (i.e. to fall in with the watches of seamen and do general ship's duties.

The senior NCO of whatever rank was always known as the sergeant major. There was also a sergeant GI who did the same duties as the Gunner's mate -- i.e. both were mainstays of the gunnery officer. The Sergeant's mess was a corner of the Marines mess deck, 4' x 7', with a canvas screen around it. The jobs of butcher, lamp trimmer, gun sweeper etc -- all plum jobs or, as we called them, square numbers. They were

all excused morning divisions evening quarters gun cleaning quarters and "clear lower deck" for boat hoisting.Around 01:00 hours the keyboard sentry would give the "Corpral of Gangway" the key to the warrant officers' galley which was conveniently situated aft. He would open up the galley, light the fire (all the galleys were coal burning) and make a fanny fall of scalding hot passion "Ki" (cocoa). The Ki was issued in slabs like thick bars of dark chocolate speckled with blobs of white fat and whilst the corporal was busy fire-lighting the sentry would be scraping the slab to a powder added to half-and-half water and ideal milk and lashings of sugar. The Ki was certainly a belly filler.

All this of course was highly illegal improperly issuing a key, failing to obtain a signature in the key book, improper use of the Admiralty stores and goodness knows what else but the Ki was good.

Quite frequently when at sea in the tropics one of the legal perks of the middle watch would be a couple of flying fish for breakfast. The very low freeboard of the Constance was no barrier at all to prevent these flying fish flying inboard. It is likely that the upper deck lights attracted them as they seldom flew inboard during daylight.

To help pass the time during night watches I often took on watch with me a length of cod line and volume 1 Manual of Seamanship, trying to learn some of the fancy knots and hitches to be found in that book. It was also a good opportunity to catch up on letter-writing.

Constance carried about 10 boy seamen. They were very strictly disciplined, turned out at 0500 hours, fell in on the upper deck at 05:30 hours did 30 minutes PT then fell in with the hands at 06:00 hours to carry on working the ship. Some of the boys were always ready to risk a "spit and drag" (smoke) and were sometimes caught as it. The punishment was six strokes of the cane, laid on by the Jaunty, across the back side, for which the boy could wear trousers but no underpants.

One of the duties performed by them was "call boy" walking around between decks piping the routine orders whilst the QM did the same along the upper deck. There was noTannoy or speaker system. Boys did not keep night watches and had to be turned in their hammocks by 20:45 hours.

The WRAs (wardroom attendants) were always Marines. The senior officers such as the first lieutenant, navigating officer and Surgeon Commander would have a Marine servants to himself

but more junior officers had to share with one WRA looking after two lieutenants. The WRA was paid extra by the officers he looked after at the rate of £1 a month. Aboard he was always known as the flunky or, in an argument, would be referred to by his adversary as a "banana bouncing bastard." The flunkies had a separate mess but still on the Marines mess deck and they had their own mealtimes as naturally they had to be on duty at wardroom mealtimes. At the beginning of a commission one of the flankeys would be made up to corporal with corporal's pay but on the day the ship paid off he reverted to his rank of Marie

Nearly always the Marine officer's servant would be one promoted up to corporal of the flunks. Generally flunking was a pretty good job. The extra pay was helpful to the married man, they were excused most of the ship's routine and had every afternoon clear when they could get out there "caulkers" and "caulk it down" (Caulker: a strip of canvas. Caulking-down: to sleep). It was not permitted to take a hammock out of the hammock netting during the daytime.

About the only members of the Marine detachment who were not excused anything at all were the watch keepers. They were either actually on watch or else

took part in just about everything and it seemed a bit unfair when having done the middle watch the night before and was enjoying a well earned a afternoon sleep, the stand-off watchkeeper would be roused out in answer to the pipe "clear lower deck, up first whaler ." Meanwhile the flunkies who had enjoyed all night in the hammocks could sleep on undisturbed. There were however two privileges the watch keepers did enjoy: a "guard and steerage "and a "seven bell leave." The first meant that when the hands were called at 05:30 hours watch keepers could sleep on for another 45 minutes until 06.15 hours when they were turned out with the pipe of "up guard and steerage hammocks. " The second privilege: the watch keeper on his 36 hour stand-off could go ashore in the evening and would not be required on board until 11.30 hours the next day. In fact a seven bell leave was of use only in Bermuda, Barbados and Kingston, Jamaica , where a cabin could be booked at the RN canteen.

Constance was a canteen messing ship. The Paymaster issued the staple items of food – bread, meat, potatoes, sugar, tea, tinned milk, pickles, salmon and cocoa. The meat was always beef never mutton or pork. Nor was there ever an issue of coffee. The day's meat was issued at breakfast time so the cooks of the mess had to make a quick decision as to what sort of a dish they

would make of it. Cooks of the mess – two men of each mess were cooks for that day -- and decided the menu.. If the meat was a roasting joint the decision was easy: it had to be a "straight rush "i.e. plonk the joint in a roasting tin, smother it with a packet of Pannet and Needhams herbs, surround it with spuds and rush it straight up to the galley. In other words a straight rush from beef screen to mess deck and then from mess back to galley. If the meat was a stewing variety, again the decision was fairly easy – make it into "Oosh" by cutting the meat into small cubes, putting it into a tin with a packet of gravy powder and up to the galley with it. Some of the more ambitious cooks of the mess would decide to make an awning for the "Oosh.". This at once promote the dish to meat pie. That was about the limit of our culinary skill so far as the main dinner was concerned except that we could ring one change with the spuds: baked or steamed. Each man peeled a few potatoes before leaving the mess at breakfast time. The cooks of the mess washed them and if they were to be steamed put them in a net and took them to the galley. The seamen's mess identified their net with wooden tallies bearing the mess number but the Marines always had a brass tunic button on theirs while the flunkies marked theirs with a silver button from the tunic they wore whilst serving meal. We always reckoned to have a pud of some sort after the meat course and here

again much depended on the cooks of the mess. The lazy ones would put a pound of dry ricw in a tin with a couple of tins of Ideal milk -- a quick rice pud. Prunes and custard required but little more effort than rice but real good cooks would go for spotted Dick or plum duff, both of which were rolled in a cloth and steamed. Current double-decker was also a great favourite and of course lashings and lashings of custard with everything.

The pipe "hands to breakfast and clean, dress of the day number fives" was at 07:30 hours followed at 08:15 hours by "both watches for exercise, fall in" at 08:15 hours -- that's allowing 45 minutes to wash, shave get into the rig of the day and have breakfast. Those who wanted to smoke got onto the upper deck with a few minutes to spare before "fall in" time as the rule of no smoking between decks was strictly enforced. Cooks of the mess did not fall in with the watches at 08:15 hours but carried on with their preparations of food and cleaning for the mess but all this had to be finished and the cooks ready for morning divisions and prayers at 09:10 hours

As well as being issued with the staple articles of food already mentioned, each mess was credited with a

small sum per day for each man and this money was used to make purchases from either the paymasters issue or the NAAFI. From the issue room could be bought dry provisions – peas, beans, extra sugar (always brown demerara) and suchlike but eggs, bacon, Lyle syrup and now and then in harbour green vegetables and similar semi luxuries were bought from the NAAFI. Nobody actually handled the money: each mass had a chit book (one for the NAAFI and 14one for pusser's provisions) and the cooks of the mess made out chips for whatever extras were required. Then each month the chips were balanced up against the money allowances. Mostly the messes would have a small mess bill -- anything from a bob or two to a pound per man, depending on how well the messes had fed. Sometimes a mess would decide to live strictly pusser and so at the end of the month having a shilling or two to share out. This was always a favourite with the married men with their commitments to wives and families but the younger men generally prefererred to pay a mess bill and live high.

At 05:30 hours was the pipe "call the hands "when the quartermaster, the duty petty officer and the duty non-commissioned officer walked through the mess decks hollering out the traditional "come along then,

wakey wakey, hey ho, hey ho, lash up and stow" followed by the Marine bugler blasting out Reveille.

Usually it was possible to doze on until 05:55 hours when the bugler came round again sounding off a warning G note. Then it was little short of a miracle what could be done in five minutes – turnout, dress, lash up the fleabag with the regulation seven turns, stow it away in the netting, swallow a basin of pusser's ki, get onto the upper deck, roll a quick tickler and have a few puffs -- all before "hands fall in" at 06:00 hours.

From this time until 06:45 hours, seamen scrubbed the upper deck whilst the couple of Marines who fell in with the hands would be cleaning the ward room flat, the dodger cleaning the mess deck and the flunkies cleaning the wardroom. At about 07:00 hours came the pipe "hands to quarters clean guns". A 6 inch gun had an enormous amount of brass to be polished and it all needed to be done every day. There was a good reason for being first at gun cleaning – first there could get right inside the gun shield to the layers or trainers positions, out of sight, and whilst polishing enjoy a sly smoke.

A daily ceremony at about 09:00 hours was when the Sergeant Major would seek out the navigating officer

and report "chronometers wound sir ." I never knew whether this was reporting that the chronometers had to be wound or if it was a traditional reminder in case the navigator had forgotten to do the job?

Some navigating officers would have a chart placed on the ship's noticeboard and mark off the ship's position each day. This added interest to a lengthy sea passage and we had several of these, for example Gibraltar to Rio de Janeiro (15 days).

At sea, the "Daily Poldhu" was much appreciated -- a daily resume of the world's news of two or three typewritten sheet posted on the ship's noticeboard at 08:00 hours. The news was broadcast especially for ships at sea from Poldhu in Cornwall.

At 11:00 hours each morning came pipes, neither of which are heard in today's navy: "up spirits" followed by "hands of the mess for lime juice ." The issue of lime juice was half a pint per man per day. Many of the old soldiers thought is a bit cissy to drink their ration so there was plenty for those who liked it and most days I managed to get a pint or more of the stuff. The "up spirits" pipe was the signal for a warrant officer, the supply chief, the sergeant major and a supply rating to muster at the keyboard for the key of the spirits room and the empty rum barricoe and bring

up the day's ration of neat rum from the casks in the spirits room. The barricoe was then put in the sentries' charge until issue time at 12 noon. It was diluted to one of rum to two of water and was then known as "free water."
The free water made a drink of one third of a pint per man except for chiefs and petty officers who were entitled to "neaters" whilst the wardroom officers were not entitled at all. They had their wine bar. After all the men had been issued with their rum there were usually two or three pints left over. This was always poured away down the scuppers.

The tot was as good as currency. Having done a mess mate a good turn in a small way, the reward would be a sip of his tot or "sippers." A more arduous service would earn a gulp or "gulpers" whilst a really big job, say scrubbing a hammock, would earn a full tot. Custom decreed however that the recipient would drink less than half of it then offer it back to the rightful owner. This trading in tots was very much "conduct to the prejudice of good order and Naval discipline," but I never heard of anyone being caught out.

On the first day of each quarter we could opt out. Payment in lieu of grog was 3 pence per day or 21 shillings (£1.05)per quarter. This seems a make a

payment for a tot a bit mean, but the admiralty paid as much as it cost them.

Aboard Contance the Marines' mess deck was in the traditional place, right aft, next to the ward room, and our small arms were stored in rifle racks on the mess deck, but on commissioning a new county class cruiser in 1928 (HMS Kent) we found that this old tradition was no longer observed. Here the Marines mess deck was forr'ard and below the seamen's mess deck. They were one up on us there as they could almost always have airports open with wind scoops out whereas with the slightest sea running we Marines had to sweat it out with the ports screwed up

Constance mess deck was very small with a very low deckhead and anybody of more than the average height had to walk around with a permanent stoop.

Normally the last parade of the day was "evening quarters," which was the same as morning "divisions," less the prayers. If the ship was at sea, and especially when in company with the flagship, and "evolution" of some sort or the other would follow evening quarters: "tow forward" or "out collision mat" or perhaps "send cutter to flagship with 10 Marines with arms and ammunition." Sometimes even an Admiral liked his little joke and would signals something like

"Chief Cook to flagship with two fried eggs." Nobody knew what would be ordered so everybody was ready for anything.

After quarters and evolutions it was "hands to tea and shift night clothing." Tea was never a cooked meal -- usually bread, jam and a basin of tea. Cake: we never had any. Butter: that was something other people enjoyed.

Usually for the rest of the evening only the duty part of the watch would be called on to do various small duties such as "cover guns "or slope awning awning

The pipe at 16:30 hours was "Liberty men fall in." They paraded in the port waist, were inspected by the officer of the watch and then dismissed, remembering at the command "dismiss" to always turn forrr'ard, then down the accommodation ladder, into the boat. Even that had its tradition, embarking in a boat, juniors first, seniors last. Disembarking, seniors first juniors last.

The officer of the watch also inspected men returning from leave. Now and then one would return aboard dead drunk, perhaps supported on either side by his mates, but generally if he was quiet the officer of the watch would be unable to see anything out of the

ordinary or at least pretend not to. If however a drunk was in a stroppy mood, he would be put in "close confinement "down the cable locker flat, with the sentries on him provided by his own department. Returningboard drunk was quite a minor offence, the usual punishment being one day's pay stopped. In fact we always believed it was no offence at all; the charge was "did return aboard drunk thereby rendering himself unfit for duty." The sting was in the tail of the charge.

More serious offences were dealt with by warrant, when the punishment could be cells, loss of good conduct badges or disrating or any combination of all three. When the warrant was read the order "ships company, shun. Off caps," when everybody present removed their caps, except the Marines.

If the ship was at sea and the offender was awarded cells, he was confined in his cable locker flat with a marine sentry. In a rough seas this was really punishing to both sentry and prisoner with the ports screwed up tightly and a foul smell coming up from the cable locker. In Bermuda, being cell sentry was not so bad as there was a cellblock in the corner of the dockyard. The prisoners still had a rough time for the first four nights as he slept on for bare boards and on the fifth and alternate nights was allowed his

hammock but no head and foot ropes.

Also the first three days were low diet – one pound of ship's biscuit per day and water. No smoking, writing, shaving, or reading (except the Bible) were permitted and each morning the prisoner was given two pounds of oakum to pick i.e. a length of tarred rope which had to be rubbed out until it looked and felt like cotton wool. At the end of the day the picked oakum was weighed and had to be two pounds.

Generally we sentries could not bear to see a well liked shipmate deprived of almost everything so would go on watch with a bar of chocolate or a packet of biscuits in our pocket to pass through the grill to the prisoner. But never tobacco. The cells were liable to surprise visit by the jaunty or the Sergeant Major.

"Hands to supper" was at 19:00 hours but messes finished that meal much earlier; then as soon as the mess tables were cleared, those who wished to could sling their hammocks. Then at 2050 the pipe "clear up the mess decks and flats ready for rounds."

At 21:00 hours the officer of the watch, the jaunty, the sergeant major and the Marine bugler formed up on the upper deck aft then moved forr'ard along the upper deck -- first the bugler at intervals sounding a "G" to

bring any men in the vicinity to attention.Following him, the jaunty, carrying an oil lamp, then the officer of the watch and the Sergeant Major also with an oil lantern. Having got as far forward as possible on the upper deck they descended onto the main deck and then walked off to through the mess decks. Why the oil lamps? The only explanation I ever got was "well Nelson had them and what was good enough for Nelson . . . ." etcetera etcetera. For rounds, hammocks had to be properly slung or correctly stowed in the netting. Those who wished, to could be turned in, but those who weren't, stood to attention when the Bugler sounded the G. Finally at 22:00 hours came a long mournful pipe, followed by a very subdued quartermaster's voice saying "pipe down." That really was the end of the day apart from emergencies until it all started again next morning at 05:30 hours

Sometimes it was inevitable that small articles of kit were left scuttling around the mess deck at divisions or evening quarters. These were gathered up, and put in the scran bag. Then about once a week the pipe was passed "scran bag is now open" whereupon the owner of kit in the scranbag went along to reclaim it. The recognised fee was an inch of soap for each article and as pusser's soap was four pence per pound, one inch equalled about one penny. This small fine was intended as a reminder not to leave kit lying around

and if, say, slippers were on the scran bag, there was the minor discomfort of doing without them for a week

Clothes were washed during the first dogwatch and it always paid to be early in the wash place as often all the freshwater was used up by about 17:30 hours and trying to dhobie in salt water was pretty grim. At 18:00 hours came the pipe "washed clothes on the forecastle." There the dhobying and was triced up on the forecastle line and it paid to take good care that each article was probably stopped to this line. Anything that blew away was probably lost for ever and there was also be a good chance of a rattle "in that he did by neglect lose over the side one pair of Kd trousers. "

The first night of the commission, the older hands would be wise enough to sling their hammocks in any corner of the upper deck that was sheltered from wind wave and rain. This would seem a silly thing to do on a cold night in Chatham dockyard but the spot where a man slept that first night was by right his billet for the remainder of the commission. As 9/10 of our time was spent in the tropics an upper deck billet was a precious thing. The less worldly ones who made their way onto the upper deck when the mess deck got too hot would seldom have an unbroken night's sleep being driven

below by rain or perhaps because the upper deck started to wash down with high waves.

The dress of the day varied according to the climate, the whim of the captain or, when in company with the flagship, the whim of the Admiral. Number ones were best blue suits with stripes and badges, such as seaman gunner or diver in gold whilst the marine wore his striped trousers. Usually this was the shore-going dress but sometimes in small out of the way ports number twos could be worn. Number threes were the blue working dress when the Marines could wear his plain serge trousers. The seaman wore his taped collar in all three rigs but when the hands were piped "to tea and shift night clothing" he removed the collar. Number fives were the working dress, in hot weather seamen in white ducks, marine marines in khaki drill whilst number sixes were the hot weather equivalents of number ones. When the letter A followed the number it indicated negative jumpers. We Marines loathed hearing the pipe "dress of the day, tropical rig." Wearing it we look ridiculous. Our tropical rig was black boots, seamen's blue woollen stockings, khaki drill shorts and a quaint thing called a "tropical singlet." A short sleeve round neck garment with a "T" of double material across the shoulders and down the spine. In use, they lasted a very few weeks

so we then had to use the seamen's white singlet. The number one tiddly tunic was still a couple of years in the future and when we got there we didn't like them. It was a work of art to polish the 20 buttons without soiling the yellow braid and they were stiff, hot and tight. When the dress of the day was number ones very few marines went ashore before 16:00 hours. Up to that time the tiddly tunic had to be worn; after 1600 the plain blue unit.

There was usually a faintly hostile air between seamen and Marines. A great joke among the barefooted seamen when a marine walked by, was to say to his mates "mind your toes mates, here's a bullock charging around." Whereupon the bullock would retort with an offensive remark concerning "web toed bastards." This of course referred to the saying that the matelots spend so much of their time with his feet in salt water like the seagulls which grew webbing between the toes. On the other hand relations between the stokers and Marines were always very close and friendly. Perhaps the coolness between seamen and Marines stemmed from the keen rivalry at gunnery with the Marines gun crew usually winning despite the fact that the seamen manned three of the four six-inch guns that Constance carried an had a three-to-one advantage.At least once a week each gun crew would be piped to "loader drill" the loader being

a metal frame on which was mounted the breach end of a six-inch gun. The drill was to load as many rounds as possible in one minute, but no shortcuts were permitted. Each round had to be properly loaded, rammed home, followed by the cordite charge, while the breach worker had to correctly rime the vent and insert the firing cartridge in the lock. A good gun crew could achieve 14 rounds in one minute and as the 6 inch projectile weighed 100 pounds, the ammunition numbers worked hard for that space of time handling half a ton of projectiles. Of course the guns could never be fired at that rate as they were usually fired in broadsides so the commissioned to gunner in the foretop had to wait for the "all guns ready" lamps to light up then perhaps another wait whilst the ship came back from a roll before his telescopic sight came onto the target. When the fire gong at the gun rang it was an indication that at any second the guns would fire. The interval between the gong and the bang could be anything up to about 10 seconds and no matter how many times a gun crew had been closed up for a full-calibre shoot that interval was always a very tense one but after the first round had been fired all the suspense went away.

Occasionally at the cease fire a gun could for one reason or another still have a projectile up the spout. If it was safe and convenient to do so the captain would

order that the round be cleared by firing which was a quick and easy solution to the problem but sometimes the projectile had to be pushed out by using an ejector from the barrel end. This was not too bad with a six-inch gun where the projectile was rammed home by hand but the eight-inch, rammed home by power, could take anything up to two hours to clear.

After a night shoot it would be rather late when the gun crew crawled into their fleabags. We spent a lot of time at our guns what with gun drills, sub-calibre shoots, full-calibre shoots, day and night firings, throw-off shoots, towed target shoots until we could handle a six-inch gun as easily as we did our Lee Enfield rifles. The gun layer was always a qualified GL2 (ie gun layer second-class) for which he was paid sixpence per day (2.5p) and was in charge of the gun and gun crew. It could happen (and did) that the gun layer was of marine rank and had a corporal in the crew and that was the Marine gave orders to an NCO, possibly the only circumstances under which this could happen.

Aboardd most ships Wednesdays and Saturdays were "make and mend" days i.e. all work finished at 12 noon. As the quartermaster and sideboy walked around the ship piping "hands to dinner. Hands to make and mend clothes" they were always greeted

with a loud cheers. By 13:00 hours on those days everybody except men on watch had caulked it down but even on make and mend days evening quarters was still exercised at 1600 but there were seldom any drills or evolutions after quarters.

HMS Constance was a cruiser from the days of the First World War. She had sustained some damage to her superstructure at the Battle of Jutland and the patches could still be seen. This class cruiser was not really suitable for service in the tropics and we did only one year in her during which time we did two cruises around the West Indian islands and to Georgetown in what is now Guyana then wandered around the gulf of Mexico calling in several several Mexican ports, on to Honduras and so to Mobile a port in Alabama USA.

It was here that we first encountered the almost embarrassing hospitality of the American people. It was almost impossible to take a walk we had only to walk a few paces along the dockside when a car would pull up and the driver askW "where are you heading for Buddy," followed by an invitation to, "Hop in and I will show you around." Then after a couple of hours of sightseeing we would finish up being invited home to supper.

HMS Curlew was also there. It was the month of February and time for the annual carnival of Mardi Gras so the Marines of both ships took part in a ceremonial march of about two miles through the town. Also in the procession were the Connecticut foot guards in their green uniforms, Yankee Marines, seamen and police. The local press reported us as being "sturdy platoons of British marines swinging along in perfect unison with that rolling gate of seafaring men with stone faces so set not even the bevies of beautiful girls lining the routes could turn their eyes."

From mobile we returned to Bermuda where we arrived in mid March after a further short cruise around the Mexican gulf. Two days later we four youngsters who were watch-keeping on the keyboard were relieved by seamen as it was now time for the detachment to do the annual musketry course.

For this the detachment was divided into two halves each half doing one week in camp except for the watch keepers. We had the whole fortnight ashore. We embarked in a steam drifter and were ferried across Grassy Bay to Inverurie from where a short march took us to Warwick camp. In fact this two weeks was really a holiday for us. The practice shoots occupied

but a few hours and the qualifying shoots but a few hours more. Most days we paraded at 09:00 hours, did quarter of an hour's arms drill and were then dismissed, free to roam around deserted coral beaches with not a tourist in sight anywhere. The catering was done by Portuguese (there were quite a few of them domiciled in Bermuda) so for the two weeks we were relieved of the chore of cook of the mess and as we had our flea bags with us we spent comfortable nights -- all in all a very pleasant holiday!However all good things must end and so came the day when we returned to the ship and to watch keeping on the keyboard.

A few days later HMS Calcutta left for England to pay off. She was flagship and had commissioned in 1923 before the RMA and the RMLI had amalgamated so still had a mixed a detachment of red and blue Marines. Was she the last to have such a mixture? However there was not a lot of time to ponder on this as a few weeks later HMS Constance also left for England -- not to pay off but for the ship's company to transfer en masse to HMS Colombo.

On arrival in Chatham dockyard each watch was given four days leave. Then we were on our way back to Bermuda leaving Chatham in early July but it would be November before we arrived at the base as

we took a somewhat roundabout route to get there, the first stop being Gibraltar.

Here the fashionable thing to do was to go ashore and get half boozed on coffee royals -- coffee laced with whiskey, three or four of which were enough to make anyone feel happy. The four days we spent in Gib was enough to enable each watch to go ashore to indulge in the fashion.

Our next port of call, Rio de Janeiro, involved a sea passage of 16 days, judged by any standard two weeks and two days at sea was a fairly lengthy time. At Rio began the endless round of Banyan parties. In the four days we spent in that port I attended two of them, one a trip to the Corcovado mountains only a few miles from Rio and one to the Petropolis mountains about 50 miles away.

Then to Montevideo in Uruguay across the mouth of the river plate to Buenos Aires and of course Banyan parties at both places. From Buenos Aires, we dropped down to Port Stanley in the Falkland Islands where we stayed only 24 hours. It looked a miserable place, cold wet and windy. Then on through the Magellans straits to Punta Arenas, the most southerly town in the world. This must have been an anxious time for the captain

and navigating officer as we were often within a few hundred yards of vicious looking black cliffs with ice sliding of them into the sea. Although we were at Punta Arenas for only two days the detachment was landed to take part with Chilean troops in some sort of National Day celebration.

Then on again and having completed the passage through the Straits we emerged into the Pacific with the days quickly warming up as we steamed northwards along the east coast of Chile calling at several ports until we arrived at Valparaiso.

It was now late September and the detachment was again landed to travel by train the 80 miles to San Diego, the Chilean capital. Here we marched in possession with the Chilean troops celebrating yet another day of national importance. The next port of call, Callao, in Peru saw the detachment ashore yet again to attend the ceremony of the re-interment of a general Miller a nautical hero who had helped that country in its fight for independence.

Then late in October we passed through the Panama Canal and out into the Atlantic, almost completing a circumnavigation of the South American continent.

Heading north we made our way straight to Bermuda.

Here we quickly found we were back in the real navy with Banyan parties a thing of the past. Our admiral kept us hard at it doing plenty of time at sea in the waters around Bermuda with six-inch gun shoots three-inch anti aircraft shoots, torpedo runs, depth charge exercises and all the complicated evolutions a commander in chief can do with a cruiser Squadron. After all, he had his four ships together for very short periods and in the few weeks that remained of 1926 he gave us all a good shake up.

January 2 1927 saw all four ships putting to sea, each to go off on independent cruising around the West Indian islands. At several of these islands we Marines were landed to do an early morning March through the principal town, the column headed by our Royal Marines Captain and the local police chief. The message from the chief to the locals seemed to be "don't you ever dare to misbehave for if you do a cruiser will quickly be here with these Marines backing up my policemen."

On January 14 we met HMS Calcutta at sea and both ships proceeded to Kingston Jamaica to await the arrival of the battle cruiser Renown with the Duke and Duchess of York on board who were on their way to Australia. They stayed only three days doing a ceremonial drive through Kingston on one of those

days and for this the Marines joined forces with a battalion of the Green Howards for street-lining duties. As soon as Renown left so did the two cruisers to resume cruising around the islands.

By February 21 we had got to the island of Saint Lucia when having spent all of 24 hours quietly at anchor in the beautiful little harbour of Castries a wireless message came from the flagship ordering us to "proceed with all dispatch" to Corinto on the Pacific coast of Nicaragua.

This order was received at about midnight and the captain was ashore staying with the governor so I was quickly roused out of my fleabag to take the signal to him. It was a bit eerie walking along a dirt track road in the dark through unfamiliar country but there was no chance of getting lost as the road lead only to the governor's house and in a couple of hours the captain and myself were back aboard and by 0400 hours we were at sea doing 23 knots en route to Panama and Corinto.On arrival the British chargé d'affaires came aboard to tell us that fighting in the capital Managua had resulted in some British property being destroyed and that he considered British lives were at risk so he had asked for a warship to act if necessary as a refugee ship. Happily no refugees came aboard. It would have been difficult to know where to stow them

in the very cramped living spaces between decks.

After seven days the fighting died down so Columbo left to resume cruising in the Caribbean and eventually back to Bermuda this time for a fairly lengthy stay of two months.

The time passed quickly until late June when we left the base again once more making for the Panama Canal to do a cruise up the Pacific coast of central America, the USA and Canada calling at the way at San Diego, California, and San Francisco and so on to new Westminster, the port for Vancouver, British Columbia and then spent a few weeks in and around the ports of Vancouver Island and then steamed along the British Columbia Coast to Prince Rupert way up in the north of the province.

Now of course we had to retrace our steps to get back through the Panama passing through for the fifth and last time. Did columbo create a record for a British warship by passing through the Panama five times in less than a year? If so does she still holds that record?

We arrived back in Bermuda in mid October. The ship was now due for a refit so went into the floating dock for five weeks and us Marines were sent ashore to the camp at Warwick for a musketry course thus avoiding

the misery of living in a ship undergoing a refit.

On returning to the ship we had only a couple of weeks left in which to complete our 2.5 years on the station. This was the normal length of a foreign commission and on December 10 we left for Chatham to pay off and ran straight into a hurricane

In the opening chapters of the "History of the Royal Marines" our Marine officer Captain Sheppard wrote that we ran through three hurricanes. To me it seems more like one again that blew for a whole week.

During the 1970s I had occasion to visit the Public Record office at Kew where all the logs of HM ships are stored, freely available to anyone. So I asked for the 1927 log of HMS Colombo and took a photostat copy of the page for December 13, a typical day for that week. This records "gear lost overboard: two verry pistols, 12 verry lights, six short lights, two boats quarter lights, six boats fall reels, all waist running gear, three blocks for sea boats, falls of starboard whaler parted, 27ft Montagu whaler lost, skiff lost." I have no idea what a "dismounting bogey, rear" was but anyway we lost that over the side as well. While the log records that sort of thing it does not record the utter misery of a violently rolling ship with several inches of seawater sloshing

back-and-forth on the mess deck and muggy atmosphere between decks with all the doors and hatches and ports screwed up tightly.

After a week of this, the weather had moderated a little and I was able to poke my head through a manhole cover on the after poop and see the most welcome site ever – away in the distance on the port bow the light house of Bishop's Rock off the Isles of Scilly winking at us in the friendliest manner imaginable telling us that this particular ordeal was almost over

On December 23 we arrived in Chatham dockyard, an object of great interest among the dockyard mateys with our upper deck swept clear of all the loose gear and the boat davits swinging free with most of the boats gone

On arrival half the ship's company went off on four days Christmas leave while the other half enjoyed four days New Year's leave.

On the January 30 the ship paid off and we marched into barracks and on to 35 days of foreign service leave. Forteen days per year was granted to a man returning from overseas service but service in the home fleet was rewarded with 28 days per year. This

seemed somewhat unfair especially as the home fleet man could look forward to several weekend leaves in the course of the year and in the event of a domestic crisis he could be granted compassionate leave and be home in a few hours.

Returning from leave I was detailed to join as squad doing revision of infantry drill. Arms drill by numbers seemed a pretty futile pastime to me so I put in a chit volunteering for a ship and the next day was out of the revision squad to join the men during their pre-embarkation runs for HMS Royal Oak, a battleship due to commission for service in the Mediterranean

Fortunately I was officially designated as a "waiting man" -- that is to say I did all the runs but was held in reserve in case anybody dropped out. Nobody dropped out and I was very pleased to see the Royal Oak detachment marched out of barracks without me. Pleased for two reasons: one that battleship service was not very popular and generally referred to as "pusser's-built bastards," with a more rigid discipline than on the smaller ships; two, service in the Med was not held in high regard as it seemed that the Med fleet spent about 10 months of the year in Grand Harbour,

Malta -- not an exciting prospect.

The day after the Royal Oak detachment marched out I was detailed for the detachment of HMS Kent, a new county class cruiser commissioning for service as flagship on the China station. Early in April we marched out of barracks to the Kent laying in Chatham Harbour and it would be just over three years before we marched in again.

We took the usual route to the far East – Gibraltar, Malta, Port said, through the Suez, down the red Sea to Aidan, then across the Indian Ocean to Columbo, on to Singapore and so to Hong Kong.

Late in August we met HMS Hawkins at way Wei-Hai-Wei in the north of China and took over from her our role as flagship.

The china fleet in those day days was an impressive one with a total of 52 ships made up of six cruisers, one aircraft carrier, five sloops, a flotilla of nine destroyers, a flotilla of 12 submarines, a submarine depot ship, a survey ship and no fewer than 17 river gunboats of which 12 patrolled at the Yangtze - Kiang river, and five patrolled the West River in the south of China

The Yantse gunboats patrolled more than a thousand miles upriver and one of them, HMS Bee, carried a detachment of three Royal Marines

They were on the staff of rear Admiral, Yangtze, and the Bee was his flagship

Will the royal marines ever again serving warship a thousand miles from the sea? Apart from this each cruiser took it in turn to go up to Hankow about 600 miles upriver to stay a month at a time.

Each year in July and August the whole fleet would assemble is Wei-Hai-Wei when all of the sporting events would be fought out, the chief of which was the fleet regatta

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For two days all work ceased at 09:00 hours and the whole day devoted to boat racing. Then by September the anchorage at Wei-Hai-Wei would be empty, the five cruisers each going their own way on an independent cruise around North China.

At the small port of Chin-Wang-Toa, each watch was granted leave enabling us to do the short rail journey to Pekin and to spend four days in that fascinating

city.

Early December saw us anchored in Yokohama Bay, just one of many warships lined up for a review of the Japanese fleet by the Emperor Hirohito on the occasion of his coronation

The Marines were kept busy providing a guard and band for various foreign admirals paying courtesy visits to the ship and the 0800 daily ceremony of hoisting the White Ensign was a rather lengthy affair involving the playing of seven or eight national anthems and it would be about 08:30 hours before the "guard and band" marched off the quarterdeck.

So passed three interesting years, cruising around the China Seas visiting Sumatra, Java, Borneo, Celebes, the Malay peninsular and Siam (three days ashore here exploring Bangkok). Kent was a happy ship so the time spent in her was both happy and interesting.

Earlier in this narrative it was stated that a marine of the 1920s was very much more a creature of the sea than land animal and that "per mare" was of far greater significance than "per terram."

Now in the 1980s all that I know of Marines life is gleaned from the press and television. Is it reasonable

to conclude that the modern marine is almost totally a soldier? I think we Marines of the 1920s probably had a more interesting life.

In this account the rates of pay during the 1920s have been mentioned: 15p per day on joining 20p per day on completion of 18 months training, and after three years an extra 2.5p. Additions to the daily rate could be earned by various qualifications such as a little over one penny per day for a gunner or perhaps 2.5p for the fairly responsible job of gun layer second-class. These all sound very meagre payments but to set against them must be considered the fact that one could go ashore in Chatham or Pompey with 20p have a pretty good evening and return to barracks with a couple of coppers change. A pint of good bitter cost 3p and a packet of 10 Players cigarettes 2.5p with a good meal in a café 5p and perhaps a copper or two for fares on the tram car. The same run ashore today would probably cost a few quid or more so perhaps pay rates were at about the same value as the rates of today.

There was a very welcome addition to our income which could amount to as much as £3-£4 for the year known as "compensation in lieu of annual issue of clothing."

Each year we were entitled to an issue of two blue serge tunics and two pairs of blue serge trousers and of course spending so much time in the tropics we seldom wore this blue uniform so were able year after year to claim the compensation in lieu thereof.

The greatcoat was issued every third year but again was seldom worn and I still in 1930 had the coat issued in 1924. But when I claimed compensation it was refused, not because the coat was shabby but because it was the old-fashioned dark grey and by1930 the vast majority of Marines had been issued with the detested army -style khaki overcoat.

Then such things as the flannel shirts, the blue cotton shirt and longjohns were never worn nor were the army grey socks all of which added a few shillings to the compensation money.

The grey socks were quite useless anyway. The first time they were dipped in hot water they would shrink to about half size so what do we do with such articles of clothing? Fortunately each year we had what was known as the paymaster's clothing store where we could buy such things as white cellular vests, navy blue socks, and for shoregoing Navy pattern boots – compared to the Marines' clodhoppers these boots were the last word in elegant footwear

During the first dogwatch on the first of the month (payday) would be passed the pipe "slop room is now open" when those who wished to could wander down and purchase such items as they needed all of which were incredibly.

After buying such items we reckoned that come the end of the year the compensation money would still leave us with a couple of quid in hand!