

CHAPTER 3 - Part 4 The Cherry Boys

We departed Hong Kong and sailed for Singapore. The weather was getting warmer and conditions in the messdecks were becoming worse. The ship only had re-circulated air through punkah louvres and scuttles (port-holes) for ventilation. Rig of the day was shorts and sandals. The Bridge Wireless Office was like a sauna and the engineers rigged a pump at the entranceway to 01 Deck with a large flexible hose attached, to suck in fresh, hot air from outside and pump it into the office. Us that didn't smoke became victims of passive smoking in the mess and in the office. Plenty of "Limers" (lime juice) was consumed along with salt pills to replace everything that we sweated out.

Sleeping arrangements changed. Up until now, I had shifted my hammock from one area to another and the senior hands in the mess had drawn stretchers from stores and were sleeping in the LRR and transmitter rooms. I took advantage of this and was able to put my hammock up at night in 6 Mess. At one point I had rigged my "mick" on the upper deck, port side, between awning stanchions just aft of the focsle and adjacent to the Padre's cabin (Harry Taylor). All went well for a couple of nights until I awoke one morning and found myself hanging out over the sea. The ship was heeling from one side to the other. As the ship heeled to starboard, I jumped out of the hammock onto the deck. Took my hammock back down to the stowage cage in the mess and vowed never to go back there again.

We reached Singapore Naval Base on the 7th June and most of the crew found themselves in a dilemma. Singapore was 17 miles away and most of us had spent all our money in Hong Kong! However, the local village of Sembawang was only just outside one of the Main Gates and abounded with bars and local stores. Not forgetting the proverbial "Banjo" - a long bread roll filled with prawn omelette that had been cooked on the back of a vendor's bike - small gas ring on which a wok was used, along with spit to start off the egg dish! We didn't seem to care about getting the dreaded lurgy in those days. If you were Duty Watch, you would give money to a shipmate who was going ashore, to get you a Banjo on their way back. Invariably you would wake up in the morning with a cold, soggy roll either under your pillow or sitting on your arm.

Just behind Sembawang, the jungle flourished and traditional Kampongs, or Malaysian villages, were still predominant. About six of us were ashore one night having a few beers in one of the local bars and it was decided that we should provide further economy to the area by losing our virginity. On reaching our destination, the MamaSan lined us up and proceeded to check the end of our noses to see if we were Cherry Boys. Those of us that had intact noses got "it" for free. We didn't contribute much money to the local economy that night as only one poor unfortunate had to fork out \$10 Singapore dollars despite his protestations that he was indeed, a virgin.

On another other occasion, Bud Abbott and myself came out of the Melbourne Bar to be beckoned by a local in a flash limo. "You ferrahs wanna see brew movies?" To which we agreed, hopped into the limo, which then drove off into the jungle along a dirt road until we reached a large tin shed. Inside, the place was full of commonwealth matelots. The young lass at the door asked if we wanted a \$5 or \$10 seat. When asked what was the difference, she said "For 5 dorrah, you watch movie. For 10 dorrah, you get bro job." Determining that the young ladies on their knees in the back row weren't using mouthwash, we elected to just watch the movies. The movies all starred that great English Porn Star, John Holmes. Tall, skinny guy, naked except for black socks.

Areas of interest in Singapore itself were the Britannia Club, the Union Jack Club, Change Alley (for cheap shopping) and Bugis Street - area famous for the mustering of transvestites and jacks who wanted to climb on top of the toilet and do the dance of the Flamers!

We reverted to Hand Message Organisation in Singapore and the ships company worked tropical routine - started work at 0700 until 1300, then leave was piped except for Duty Watch. For us Ords, leave was up at 0100; everyone else 0700.

Five days later, we found ourselves back at sea, this time with the Far East Fleet in Exercise Windy Weather. This kept us at sea until the 19th June when we returned to Singapore. However, on the 21st we sailed in company with **HM Ships Albion** and **Bulwark**, the Commando Carriers, to the coast off Sarawak, North Borneo. Our job was to protect the carriers against attack whilst Albion's Helicopters and Commandos relieved Bulwark's ashore at Sibul and to carry out patrols off the Borneo coast. We also dropped off a squad of Gurkha signallers at a different location along the coast. They had been billeted in the Radio Operator's living quarters on the ship (6 Mess) whilst on passage.



Don and Bud doing Cooks of the Mess - these two really loved this duty!

The ship returned to Singapore NB on the 1st July and secured to a buoy in the channel. The next few days were spent preparing for FO2FEF's (Flag Officer, 2nd in Command, Far East Fleet) inspection. This started off with a Harbour Inspection followed by the sea inspection on the 6th July and then returning to the buoy later that night. We went alongside on the 9th July to store ship and prepared to sail to Bangkok, Thailand. Sailed on the 13th, meeting up with **HMNZS Hickleton**, who was to accompany us to Bangkok. The two ships arrived at Bangkok on the 16th and both ships companies enjoyed a six-day visit.



Penny and myself hired a taxi for the day and enjoyed the cultural aspects of Bangkok as can be seen of yours truly at one of the temples that we visited. The taxi driver suggested a massage parlour to finish off the day. Never had one before and found it thoroughly enjoyable, especially the tiddly finish.



Royalist ahead of Hickleton on the Chao-Praya river

We sailed in company with Hickleton on Thursday 22nd July, and after leaving her to continue on to Singapore alone, Royalist detached to the island of Pulau Tioman to anchor off for the weekend. Here, a small Royalist colony was set up on the beach each day - a BBQ was built and hundreds of steaks were cooked. Interesting to note that the local menfolk set up fizzy drink stands. The drinks were warm, but in that heat, it was refreshing. On asking where the girls were, we were told that every time a navy ship came in, the women were sent up into the hills! Every night, we had to put to sea to investigate Indonesian activity that had been reported along the coast of mainland Malaysia.

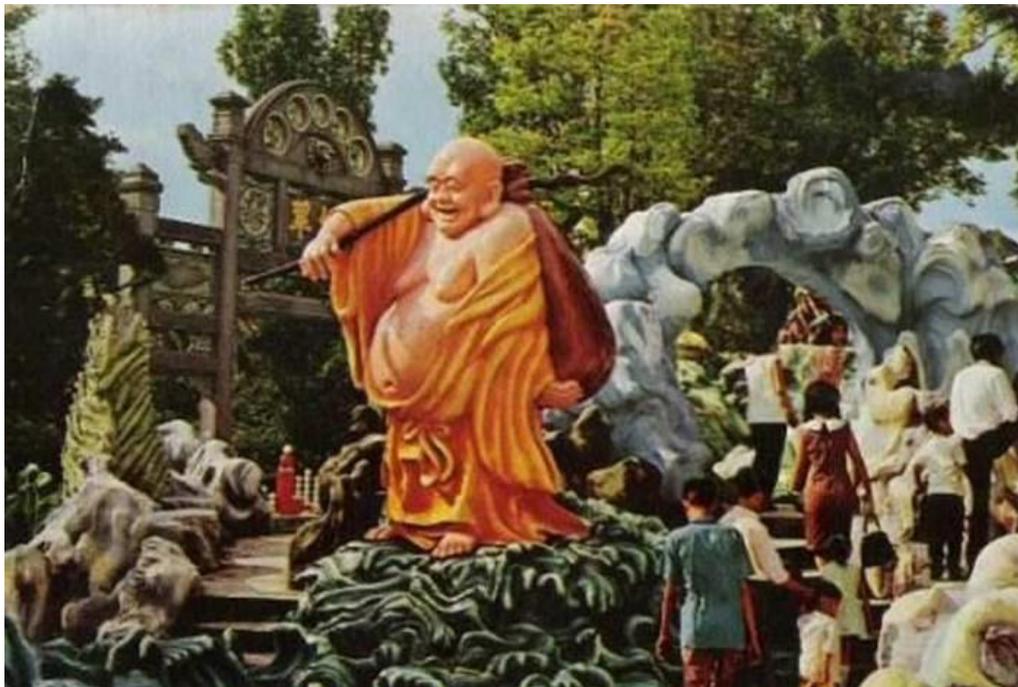
Gunnery exercises and replenishments at sea killed the next few days, but on the 28th of July the ship secured alongside in Singapore Dockyard for two weeks maintenance.

During the first week of this period, Royalist was Guard Ship for Operation Awkward - the procedure put into place for defence against attack from enemy divers.

Ships' whalers were used for this with each boat crewed by a L/S (coxswain), a stoker to look after the engine, an AB who sat in the bow and was also lookout, and a Radio Operator. Each boat had to report back to the Guard Ship as it did its rounds of the Naval Base and Channel. The boats carried several one-pound scare charges, which were dropped over the side at irregular intervals or if bubbles were seen in the water. If one of these charges exploded near a diver, it was supposed to damage his eardrums and force him to the surface. Several divers were forced to the surface during the conflict and captured, but on the night of the 4 June an Indonesian diver was killed by the blast of a scare charge. He had been trying to attach a limpet mine to one of the carriers. Another enemy diver was killed later that year. I did a stint on the boats as the radio operator.

Ships were floodlit at night just above the water line to enable the light to shine in to the water. This allowed clearer visibility of any underwater activity. Sentries also patrolled the wharves and on the outboard side of the ships. We were woken up one night by the Emergency alarms going off and the ship's company had to get off the ship. The guard on the wharf had seen bubbles in the water coming from underneath Royalist's hull. Our divers went down but didn't find any mines or enemy divers.

This time in Singapore a visit to the Tiger Balm Gardens (also known as Haw Par Villa) was in order to see the unusual sculptures - bigger and different to the Gardens in Hong Kong.



This break came to an end on the 14th August when we put to sea for gunnery trials for the day, coming back to swing round the buoy again that night. This lasted for two days before we sailed as part of the Far East Strategic Reserve Fleet on Exercise Guardrail (commonly called "Rusty" Guardrail). On this occasion whilst en route from Singapore, the fleet took passage close to the Vietnamese coast. The transit took place at night and Royalist was ordered to Action Stations. The early warning radar (Type 960) had picked up what was thought to be aircraft taking off from a carrier. It was known that there were no friendly vessels in the area at the time. After what appeared to be an abnormally long time, the ship was relaxed from Action Stations. Royalist had investigated

the contact and found it to be a neutral tanker venting its oil tanks. The Fleet sailed on to Subic Bay in the Philippines and spent two days there, where sailors from four different nations (Aus, NZ, Britain and the US) enjoyed the delights of the local town of Olongapo - mainly one street full of bars (the odd shop may have been squeezed in there somewhere). The communicators went in to two watches and our oppos were 1st Port - the Black Watch.

Most of the ships were anchored out and the US Navy ran shuttles to get the matelots back to their ships. Invariably caps were swapped causing utter confusion when sailors staggered on to the wrong ships. I believe there was a good swimming pool on the Naval Base, but I'm not sure if it was used much by the visiting ships.

During this Exercise period, the EWO was manned, except at anchor in Subic Bay, and it was known that an RN Submarine was acting as the enemy. I was on watch in front of the UA3 thinking how boring it was, when a zip came through the earphones and a trace appeared on the screen. Excitedly, I switched on the Action Intercom, blew the whistle and yelled out "Submarine radar bearing 2 o'clock!" I had forgotten about Green, Red, bearings etc..About 30 seconds later the door burst open and an irate Senior Rate RP said "Waddy mean 2 o'clock!!" Fortunately there was still a faint trace on the screen...After that, I felt that an EW future in the navy was not for me.

Exercise Guardrail continued with the ship undergoing all types of evolutions until the 2nd September when we detached from the Fleet for Hong Kong. This was just a short visit before we headed north to Japan. In spite of hot, humid weather, Hong Kong had not lost its appeal with the ship's company and on the 6th September much hard-earned money changed hands with the proprietors of several bars and other establishments.

On the 11th, we sailed for Otaru in northern Japan in company with **HMS Devonshire**. Exercised briefly for the day with her before the two ships went their separate ways. En route, we sailed through the Taiwan Straits, which separates mainland China from Taiwan.

Otaru is an ancient port on the western side of the northern island of Hokkaido, the capital of which is Sapporo. The ship arrived in Otaru on the 17th September for a five-day visit. As the port was relatively close to Russia, the ships company were issued with British Commonwealth Forces serving in Korea ID Cards. Why - I don't know!

Bud, Penny and myself went to Sapporo for the day on the Bullet train and found that they sold Sapporo Beer on the train! Sapporo is a very modern city with huge wide streets. In recent years, an annual festival is held during winter for ice sculpturing, which attracts tourists from all over the world. We went to the movies and on the way back to the station, saw a shop that sold saki and in the window was the biggest bottle you had ever seen. With what money we had left, we purchased said bottle and the only one who had a burberry (Penny) smuggled it back on board.

The ship called again at Hong Kong on 28th September and was alongside until October 7th. The Engine Room Department were instrumental in extending our stay by two days, but unfortunately neglected to provide the necessary finance for two extra days shopping. During this period, Chief RS Alec Crighton took the sparkers ashore to the China Fleet Club for a banquet, including drinks. After the dinner, all the young operators were sent on their way with ten HK dollars each (in today's money that was equivalent to about a dollar and fifty cents NZ - a lot of money in those days) whilst

the senior hands stayed behind and did their thing. The banquet was possible due to the money made by the Department sending private radio telegrams, interflora flowers and radio telephone calls for the ships company.

Bud, Penny and self went ashore the next day with Penny smuggling the bottle of saki underneath his burberry. We selected a bar in Wanchai that had the least amount of lighting inside and selected a table in the far corner. We had just enough money left to buy a few bottles of coke. This we mixed with the saki. Bud and I decided that we needed to have a pee, so we went to the toilet. Bud looked at me, gave a drunken grin and slid down the urinal. I picked him up and managed to get him back to the table. We finished the saki and staggered outside. Penny, who had been doing chin-ups in the 3rd TR (which didn't have any equipment in it) on the Sea-cock valve rods and swimming in Aggie's pool, had built up tremendous strength to his upper body.

He could see that Bud and I were in no fit state to walk back to the ship and as we didn't have any money for a taxi, he threw us over his shoulders and walked back to the ship. Once we got near to the ship, we all managed to walk back on board. Penny disappeared and Bud and I went down to our messdeck, felt hungry and decided to raid the Mess Traps. Inside, were two tins of "Herrings-In". These we grabbed and made our way to the focsle to devour the contents. Staggered back to the mess and too tired to get our hammocks out, crashed on two of the long seats. The following morning, we were rudely awakened by the Killick of the Mess (Rick) who said "...and who has been into the Mess Traps and taken the last two tins of Herrings-In?" As our uniforms were both covered in tomato sauce, we couldn't say otherwise. We copped Duty Cooks for a week.

After these few days of frantic last minute shopping we sailed 7th October amidst a fusillade of firecrackers from Ah Moy and her Side Party. We joined **HM Ships Falmouth** and **Brighton** off Subic Bay on Friday 8th and after a night of exercising, entered Subic the following morning for two days alongside - actually managed to get to the swimming pool this time!

On the Monday morning, the three ships sailed for two days of exercises with Royalist detaching from Falmouth and Brighton late on October 12th, having bowed out in a blaze of gunnery glory by hitting and sinking one radio controlled fast motor boat called a firefish.

We entered Singapore on Saturday 16th October for the last time and prepared to sail for the trip home. I had been promoted to Able Radioman (a NZ Navy Order during the year had changed all rates so that rank appeared before the trade - don't know who suggested that we become radiomen and not radio operators) 13 October and when we got to Singapore Naval Base, I spent the night ashore at Aggie's - a sailors' haven in the base. The ship departed from Singapore Naval Base on Trafalgar Day (21st October) and made fuelling stops at Labuan - a small island off the coast of Sabah and then again at Manus Island, Northern Papua New Guinea. From there, Royalist was supposed to sail for a two-day stopover in Suva. However, this was cut short, when on the 1st November, shortly after the Crossing the line Ceremony in the Coral Sea, the ship stopped with serious salt-water contamination in her boilers. A Flash message was sent to the NZ Naval Board asking for assistance and the first ship to respond was the RN survey ship, **HMS Dampier**, which arrived the following afternoon. She took on fuel from Royalist and then began to tow the cruiser away from the reefs and into open water. Once there, Dampier had to leave Royalist and make for Port Moresby to take on more fuel.

In the meantime, a signal came through from Wellington that the ocean going tug, **Carlock** based in Brisbane, would arrive to take Royalist in tow. It would be a few days before she would arrive and the ship settled down to a relaxed routine. First of all, as temperatures were rising in the magazines, all the ammunition had to be brought up manually to the upper deck and thrown over the side. Not

only were temperatures rising but also tempers. All the sparkers were mustered in the BWO and the POOW (Bonga) detailed me off to take all the Ords down to the Lower Receiving Room for Morse Reading Exercises. Everyone was ready and set to go, when one of the ODS, who was senior to me, complained that he wasn't going to take orders from someone junior to him. Things came to a head and next thing, I had been hit a couple of times, knocked out and regained consciousness whilst being carried to the sick bay. Once there, I discovered that I had a black eye and my nose broken in two places. I was told to sit down in a chair as Surgeon Commander Frew was going to straighten my nose. I thought that would be ok with local anaesthetic - silly me. Two sick bay tiffs grabbed me and held me down while Doc Frew put his thumbs either side of my nose and bent it back in place. That certainly brought a tear or two to the eyes. They packed my nose and put me to bed in a bunk in the sick bay.

An entertainments committee was set up to organise events for the ships company and whilst waiting for the tug to arrive, the crew enjoyed .22 shooting from the focsle, 7.62 shooting from the quarterdeck, Miss Royalist pageant, Sod's Opera, Uckers (Ludo), Whist and card competitions and shark fishing. Bud and I sang "The Ballad of NobbyHall" at the Sod's Opera. One of the highlights during drifting was the sudden appearance of a rain cloud off the Port Beam. A pipe over the Main Broadcast encouraged the ships company to muster on the upper deck for hygiene purposes. Consequently, a few hundred naked bodies were seen lathered in soap waiting for the rain to wash it off. Unfortunately, as the rain got nearer, it split in two and went fore and aft of the ship, leaving the soap clad sailors somewhat bemused. Plastic buckets were lowered over the side into the sea and the soap was duly washed off with salt water!

Carlock arrived on Saturday 6th November and so did a RNZAF Sunderland from Suva, which dropped four canisters of mail into the water. Royalist's whaler picked these up. The Sunderland visited the next morning to take photographs before returning to Lauthala Bay.

Repairs were made good in the Boiler and engine rooms and on the 9th November, **HMNZS Lachlan** arrived from Auckland with stores, no films and no beer! She had a large canvas sign on the side as she drew near which said STEPTOE AND SONS! Lachlan also transferred 100 tons of FFO before leaving to pick up more supplies for us at Noumea. One of our sparkers (Don Mihaere) was transferred to Lachlan to help out in their Wireless Office.

On the 11th November, the ship's forward engines were brought into use for the first time since the breakdown and the ship worked up to 8 knots. As a result, at 0500 on the 12th, the tow was slipped, Royalist built up to 10 knots and Carlock took up station on the cruiser's starboard quarter. The ship took on more fuel, stores and BEER from Lachlan and proceeded under her own steam, arriving at Devonport Naval Base on the 18th November flying her paying off pennant.

Royalist did not leave the wharf at Devonport NB under her own steam again and was decommissioned 4 July 1966. Royalist left Auckland, 31 December 1967 in tow of the Japanese tug Fuji Maru, arriving at Osaka, Japan about four weeks later for breaking up by the Nissho Company. I posted off in January 1966 and went to Naval HQ in Wellington to the Naval Communication Centre.