

ANSON 6 AT THE 'DOCKYARD HOTEL' (OVER THE WALL)

It was of course inevitable that my clandestine activities at HMS Blackcap would eventually attract attention and bring the wrath of the Royal Navy down around my ears. and I somehow had a premonition that maybe something would happen but we were all prepared to take that chance. After all it was a small price to pay for the extremely lucrative 'Network' of 'Perks' which we had set up. Our 'Network' involved a relatively few carefully chosen people but practically everyone at Blackcap benefited at some time or other from 'Our Services' It would be true to say that 'The Buffer's Party' had just about everything 'Buttoned Up' and our maxim was simply 'If you need it, we can get it' Our beneficiaries ranged from Officers, Senior Rates and even the lowliest 'Erk' was not overlooked. 'Mutual Exchange' was the accepted form of currency and a flourishing trade with the nearby USAF Base was imperative and just about everything which was needed had a price tag.

It was a relatively small oversight which led to my eventual 'Come Uppance' and it would be true to say that a great many people at Blackcap were on tenterhooks regarding the possible outcome if ever I were to 'Spill the Beans' It was one of those stupid and unguarded moments which often cause upset. For example when an unsuspecting USAF Airman was routinely stopped during a Main Gate Check at his base and a quantity of Royal Navy Duty Free 'Blue Liners' were discovered in his car the 'Shit Really Hit the Fan' many thought it had been a 'Tip Off' but I have never believed this. Americans, true to their creed, launched an inquiry which involved just about everyone except the FBI and CIA. Had this been a British enquiry, a slap on the wrist and a couple of bollockings may well have sufficed but this was the Yanks we are talking about here and they just had to be 'Whiter than White' in 'Lil ol England' and as a result they made such a fuss that someone's head just had to roll.

The irony of it was that everyone benefited from the 'Blue Liner Trade' particularly the Yanks who loved our tobacco which they willingly exchanged for goods and liquor from their Base PX Stores. Probably highly illegal in technical terms but who gave a shit anyway as everyone was getting their share. When the Yanks had finally completed their extensive investigations and realised the full extent of the 'Trading' which went on between our respective Bases and the local populace, the investigations were scaled down. Nevertheless someone had to 'Put their Hands Up' and as things inevitably were traced back to me I felt that I had little option but to admit my part in it. There were hastily arranged meetings throughout the Base as everyone thought that their 'Number might be Up' and they would all be 'For the High Jump' if I 'spilled the beans'

A completely unprecedented series of events then took place in the Commander's Office with only himself, the Master at Arms and me present. The conversation which took place over two hours will forever remain a secret, suffice to say that the revelations could well have implicated just about everyone at Blackcap from Officers to Lower Deck. The hapless USAF Airman who had started all this off was promptly drafted back to the United States to another base there. In my case it seemed quite different as the Yanks were seeking justice and parity for our crimes. Yet another private meeting in the Commander's Office as before with only the three of us present a certain course of action was decided upon hopefully to finally resolve the situation. It was agreed that I had to undergo some punishment which would satisfy the Yanks and of course the dignity of Blackcap without too many people being aware of what was actually going on, which of course was an impossibility if one thinks about it. The Commander put it to me that nothing other than a

custodial sentence would be acceptable and as I had enjoyed a pretty good run at things I felt I had no choice but to agree. The Master at Arms suggested that as I had offered to take all the blame and not involve anyone else at Blackcap, it should be the relatively light sentence and 14 days Detention at RNB Portsmouth was suggested to which the Commander and I agreed. The technicalities of 'Reading a Warrant' in front of the assembled Ship's Company would in itself present a very embarrassing problem for everyone and a great deal of discussion took place before a solution was eventually found. The 'Warrant' would be read early on a Sunday morning in the presence of the Regulating Staff, Men under Punishment and the Duty Watch only, thereby complying with the terms of The Naval Discipline Act. In the meantime I was to remain under 'Open Arrest' and report to the Regulating Office until the Warrant was read. This seemed a pretty good deal to me and it allowed our activities to continue for the time being relatively uninterrupted. When I said unprecedented, I really meant it, for I have never ever known of anyone being involved in or been offered such an agreement in order to guarantee someone's silence during my entire service with the Royal Navy. In the meantime, 'The Buffer's Party' were sworn to secrecy and the final details remained private between the Commander, Master at Arms and me. On the Saturday before beginning my Sentence the Master at Arms sent for me and we had yet another private conversation which again will remain secret other than to say that matters had been arranged with the Staff at RNB Detention Quarters, Portsmouth to treat me as a 'Privileged Prisoner' in view of my relatively short sentence and to 'Go Easy' He also said that I would be back at Blackcap afterwards and to take 'Light Luggage' only. To show that he meant what he said he even gave me a 'tot' from his personal supply. The rest of the day, being Saturday was spent taking things easy as usual and the Beer at the 'Appleton Thorn' took a real pasting.

On Sunday morning at 0730 as instructed I mustered with the Men under Punishment and Duty Watch. The Regulating Staff were also fallen in and there must have no more than a dozen men assembled. Promptly at 0745 The Commander came out of the Regulating Office with the Master at Arms. I was dressed in my best No.1 uniform in the centre flanked by two R.P.O's with the Master at Arms next the Commander. The Parade were ordered to "Off Caps" and the Commander slowly read out the terms of the Warrant "Contrary to the Good Order of Naval Discipline" etc etc etc "is hereby sentenced to a term of 14 days detention in accordance with the Provisions of the Act etc etc etc. "Parade On Caps, Turning Right Dismiss "Bawled the Master at Arms. Saluting the Commander he then ordered "Prisoner and Escorts, Right Turn, Quick March" We all then marched back into the Regulating Office to await my escort who would take me down to Portsmouth. I could not believe it was over so quickly it seemed almost as if someone wanted it that way and the situation was pre-ordained. I didn't even go into the remand cells instead; I had coffee with the Duty Regulating Staff in the Office whilst I awaited my escort. Even they did not surprise me as they turned out to be 'Dutch' Holland and 'Knocker' Powell of 'The Buffer's Party'. "I thought you would like a couple of your mates" Whispered the 'Jossman' "It will give you all a chance to sort things out" One important fact stuck in my mind and that was simply, there was absolutely no animosity or rancour at my self imposed predicament. There was only regret and maybe sympathy towards me which was extremely comforting as the 'Jossman' briefly took me aside as my transport arrived. His words inspired and encouraged me "That everything would be OK for the next couple of weeks and not to worry as I would soon be back" The simple fact that I was not taking all my kit indicated to me that they perhaps knew something that I did not and that was not a situation that I was used to. As I climbed aboard the 'Pusser's Tilley' for my short journey to Warrington Railway Station I noticed the unbelievable sight of the entire Buffer's Party and duty Regulating Staff waving me off. My

thoughts at that time drifted to the private meetings between the Commander, Master at Arms and myself some weeks previously and that in some way maybe their part in our 'Arrangement' would be honoured. Perhaps my mind had been somewhat eased by 'The Jossman's' final words to me I felt were genuine and I decided finally to accept 'The Cards Which Fate Had Dealt Me; Together with my escort we arrived at Warrington Station as our London train pulled in. There was a sticker on our carriage indicating 'Reserved' and I was glad of the privacy it afforded as it gave us the opportunity to discuss hitherto unmentioned subjects to ensure that 'Our Network' continued efficiently during my 'Leave of Absence' and no one 'dipped out' As we were about to settle down into our seats Dutch threw my bag onto the overhead rack. "Be careful" I admonished him. "There's something breakable in there" Dutch and Knocker exchanged knowing glances and Dutch retrieved the bag from the rack. Unzipping it he pulled out a familiar bottle of Jim Beam American Bourbon which for some reason the Jossman did not confiscate together with three plastic beakers. "You'd better be Mother" I said, handing the bottle to Knocker who needed no second bidding and we all settled down in our seats for the journey to London.

By the time our train pulled into Euston it was lunchtime and waiting on the platform was a familiar blue Bedford 'Tilly' with RN emblazoned on the side. Two Naval 'Crushers' stood by and spotting the white belts and gaitors worn by Dutch and Knocker they beckoned us over. "Jump in lads there's a bagged meal for each of you and we will run you over to Waterloo we've plenty of time" As it was Sunday and we were in no hurry, we were all treated to a brief sightseeing tour of the great metropolis before boarding our train at Waterloo in yet another 'Reserved' compartment. The journey to Portsmouth was painfully slow and we finally arrived at the Town Station around 1600. As before there was another 'Pusser's Tilly' waiting for us and a few minutes later we turned into the Main Gates of RNB Portsmouth or HMS Victory as it was then. It has since been renamed HMS Nelson. Behind the main Gate Regulating Office was the 'Annexe' which was a holding area for the main Detention Quarters. As there was no admittance to D.Q's on Sundays this was to be my temporary lodging until the morning. My two escorts Dutch & Knocker bade me a sad farewell promising to keep an eye on things until I returned. If they were quick they could just about catch the London train from the Town Station so the offer of a lift back was much appreciated as they could be back at Blackcap before closing time at 'The Thorn' Dutch's parting remark was "We'll have a couple for you mate"

The dreaded 'Annexe' was a grim place and no mistake with a large 'Holding Cell' in its own block are with individual bunks. There was a toilet and washing area so that inmates could come and go which in turn was behind locked cell doors. I was shown into a small room which served as a 'Process Area' there was a stern looking RPO and two 'Crushers' in attendance I was ordered to strip naked before being allowed to dress again. My only luggage was a holdall which was emptied onto a nearby table and minutely examined. My wristwatch, signet ring and St Christopher chain were removed together with my waist belt containing about £20 in notes and small change "You're a bit flush aren't you" He enquired gruffly. "I always carry this much RPO as you never know when you might need it" I smiled pleasantly. "Take that f.....g stupid grin off your face" Snapped one of the 'Crushers' The other 'Crusher' began to record details of my personal possessions which were then placed in a large brown envelope which was then labelled and signed by everyone present. It was then placed in a safe nearby. The remainder of my gear including washing and toilet gear and a couple of changes of underwear and towels No 8s was checked thoroughly before being returned to my holdall. Processing now completed I was taken through into the main cell block "Change into your No8s and put your bag on the rack above your head." One of

the 'Crushers' ordered as the other opened the outer cell door and ushered me inside. There were two double cells each containing three bunks and there were already two occupants in my cell and one solitary guy in the other. The door slammed behind me and was quickly locked. "You have another guest so introduce yourselves" Said the other 'Crusher' who seemed more amiable than his colleague. My two fellow inmates came over and shook hands. "I'm Digby, just call me Digs" He said. His companion said "I'm Cookie and believe it or not I am" We all laughed and sat down on our beds. Digs indicated the lone guy in his cell next door "He never speaks to anyone, he's a loner and he's trying to 'Work His Ticket' "For the next couple of hours we exchanged histories and in particular how we came to be in our current predicaments. Apparently 'Digs' had 'jumped his ship' in the States on account of him meeting a woman over there but he was caught and shipped back and got 60 days D.Q's for his trouble.' Cookie', on the other hand was a regular at being AWOL and had received 28 days. When I told them that I had only received 14 days they were almost speechless. "Is your Dad a bloody Admiral then"? Demanded 'Digs' While 'Cookie' merely whistled his incredulity. Both of my companions had been in D.Q's before and were not apparently looking forward to it. According to them the bloke in charge was a Royal Marine Warrant Officer known as 'Tiny' as he was about 6'6" tall and built like a brick shithouse. Everyone was absolutely terrified of him and he ran the place with a rod of iron and no one, repeat no one ever gave him any trouble. Anyone who had been in D.Q's previously automatically went into what is known as the 'Hard Class' or the 'White Gaitors' They did everything at double speed and had a much harder time than the other inmates. The other golden rule is you are not allowed to speak to anyone other than the Staff who must be addressed always as Sir.

The rules seemed simple enough for me as I fully intended to keep my nose clean during my stay and I was determined that I would upset no one. It seemed the inmates were awakened at 0600 each day and after cleaning their cells or rooms as the Staff preferred to call them, 'Slopped Out' which entailed emptying their toilet buckets, rinsing and drying them before returning to their rooms to polish them with 'Brick Dust' to make them almost gleam. After which and promptly at 0700 one of the Staff would bellow "Up behind Your Doors" which would then be systematically unlocked by another member of Staff. The next command would be "Stand by to jump out" then a pause "Out" At this all the inmates would take two paces outside their 'Rooms' and stand to attention to await the next order which would be "Right & Left turn, Quick March" Everyone would then march off to the Food Hall where they would collect their meagre meal and a mug of tea. There was never meat on the menu except on Sunday when a small roast dinner followed prayers and exercise. Meals were always eaten in 'Rooms' after which came Daily Exercise and work details. During our conversation one of the 'Crushers' came into the cell block "Oi, You, Blackcap you are wanted in the Reception Area" He bawled as he unlocked the cell door and ushered me into the small room I had entered on arrival. Standing behind the small desk was the bespectacled figure of an RPO. I stood to attention in front of the desk the RPO motioned to the Crusher to leave the room.

The figure looked up and I immediately recognised RPO Harry Glover who's Messman I had been on HMS Albion a short time before. Harry looked up and grinned. "So they bloody well got you at last did they"? He enquired. I was just about to relate the circumstances to him when Harry held up his hand. "I know why you are here, your Jossman phoned to tell me you were on your way and he gave me all the circumstances and asked me to keep an eye on you." "Do you know my Jossman then"? I asked him. "We were together at Regulating School years ago and we still keep in touch often" "So you

know everything then”? I asked him. “Yes, I do, we spoke at great length and we both thought that you had a bit of a ‘green rub’ considering you could have dropped just about every bugger up there in the shit if you’d have wanted to” Harry smiled. “I’ve got a proposition for you” Said Harry. “Our Messman has just finished his time here and we need a replacement, you can do it standing on your head so what about it”? My mouth just dropped open, I was speechless. Harry smiled again “Now look, as you are only here for two weeks there seems little point in putting you through the mill. You will of course carry out the ‘Exercises and Assault Course’ just like the others but your ‘Work Station’ will be our Mess and your duties will be exactly like they were on ‘Albion’ well, maybe not quite exactly, so how about it”? Said Harry, laughing. “I think you’ve got yourself good Messman RPO” “Don’t forget the Sir to all the Staff” He reminded me. “I’m Senior Staff RPO here and Mess President so you will only answer to me is that clear”? He said. “I will see you tomorrow morning at D.Q’s Reception, now is there anything you would like to ask before you go.”? The RPO enquired. “Yes Sir, who is this ‘Tiny’ chap” I asked. Harry smiled again. “He is in charge of the Detention Centre and is responsible to no one except the Captain in RNB. His word is law at all times so remember that. I am his Second in Command, so to speak so I tend to look after most things. Just remember ‘Yes Sir, No Sir, Three Bags Full Sir and keep your mouth shut until you are spoken to OK” “Yes Sir” I replied “And Thanks” Harry pressed a bell on the desk and one of the Crushers came into the room. “You can take him back in now Jim” Harry replied.

Once back inside the Annexe cells my two companions eagerly wanted to know what had happened so I told them that because of my short sentence and lack of information they wished to interview me again and left it at that. Both ‘Digs’ and ‘Cookie’ seemed to accept this and to my relief, the matter was dropped. I glanced at my wrist and realised that I did not have a watch. “I wonder what the time is”? I asked them. “It’s exactly 1800 ‘Digs’ replied deadpan. “How on earth do you know that”? I enquired somewhat mystified at his answer. “Because, smart arses, I can hear the rattle of food trays next door” Cookie replied. Seconds later the outer door opened and a trolley containing plates of what seemed like bread and butter with pilchards on it. There was a covered tray too. “These are for you Blackcap” Sneered the Crusher quite obviously pissed off at having to serve prison inmates on a Sunday evening when he could have been doing other things. “The RPO says that they are part of your special diet and we can’t have you croaking it can we”? He almost spat sarcastically “.I was momentarily stunned until ‘Digsy explained that the crushers had been known to spit in the food

Promptly at 0830 the next morning the three of us were marched out of the Annexe carrying our kit. I was glad to be travelling light as Digs and Cookie were struggling with kitbags and hammocks. “Where’s the other bloke” I enquired. “I think he is due for the ‘Funny Farm’ Replied Cookie “He is a right nutter so I hear”. Concluded Digsy “Keep quiet, no talking” Snapped one of our escort Crushers. Along the side of the huge Parade Ground which no one dared to cross without ‘doubling’. Past the Admin Block we marched and finally reaching the extremities of the Barracks we were confronted by a massive double gate door which slowly swung open to reveal another Parade Ground with what looked like an obstacle course surrounded by a brick wall at least 20 feet high. As we entered one of the Crushers yelled “Prisoners. double march” I felt a bit sorry for my two companions who found this task almost impossible as they struggled to hold on to their kit. Finally we went through a door marked ‘Reception’ and were ordered to Halt and Left Turn to face the Charge Desk. The familiar bespectacled face of RPO Harry Glover, for once looked stern as he ordered us in turn to answer our names after which he read out our charges and

respective punishments. He then read out the do's and do'n'ts and the rules and regulations of the establishments. We were then ordered to take out our washing and toilet gear and spare No'8's, boot polish and underwear. Our kit was then placed in the adjacent baggage room. "Now pick up your gear, double mark time, follow me" Bawled the RPO as we were 'double marched' out of the room, across the parade ground and into the main cell block areas. Still 'doubling' we were shown into our respective 'rooms' arranged in rows just as I imagined a 'Prison' would be like. Still 'at the double' we were all given our final instructions. "From this moment on you will not speak unless you are spoken to by a member of Staff and you will only be known by your room number is that clear?" "Yes Sir" we all chorused. Pointing to my companions the RPO bawled "Digby, Anson 22, Cook, Anson 23 to your rooms, double march" As Digs and Cookie quickly sped off to their respective rooms the RPO whispered to me "Anson 6, that's you JR dump you gear in your room follow me and stop f.....g doubling will you" My room was the first cell on the left inside the main corridor. It was then that I noticed the immaculate condition of the block with rows of cells on the ground floor with a metal staircase leading to an upper floor from which there was a huge net to prevent inmates from hurling themselves from the upper floor some 30 feet below.

Marching smartly behind Harry across the Parade Ground I could not help noticing the huge red brick walls at least 20 feet high and typical of mid Victorian architecture. They looked grim and foreboding and I was inwardly glad that I would not be spending too much time here. Reaching the Staff Quarters at the extreme end of the Parade Ground Harry opened the door to a small but tastefully furnished lounge area complete with settees, easy chairs and tables. The adjoining room was a neat dining area and a small well equipped kitchen, pantry, galley fridge and there was a small bar at the end with a handy serving hatch, all very familiar to me. The last room of all was the sleeping area with six single beds, three on each side and lockers and cabinets for duty or resident Staff Instructors. The beds, like all those in barracks were emblazoned with the Royal Navy Anchor in blue. Adjoining the sleeping quarters were the showers and toilets. The entire quarters, understandably were immaculate. There were 2 incumbents in the Mess at the time both reading the morning newspapers and drinking tea. "Have a good look round JR, get to know the place as you will be spending most of your time in here during the day" Said Harry grinning for the first time. In the meantime I busied myself familiarising with the surroundings. As I opened cupboards, lockers and checked just where everything was stowed I heard Harry's raised voice in the other room. "We have just got ourselves the best f.....g Messman in the Andrew, now look after him and you will find out what I mean, I do not want anyone to shit on him as he genuinely has had a bloody green rub and still not dropped his mates in the shit" On hearing Harry's remarks, I suddenly became considerably more relieved and felt much easier than I had since my arrival. Having located a percolator and some coffee I decided to really enter into the spirit of things and put on a brew and soon the familiar smell of freshly bubbling coffee drew Harry and his companions from the other room like a magnet.

"I see you've settled in nicely JR" Smiled Harry as he indicated Leading Patrolman 'Pincher' Martin and RPO 'Rattler' Morgan who both smiled politely. "I've told them all about you and they will pass the message on to the rest of the lads, I will speak to 'Tiny' myself when he comes in" Said Harry "In the meantime I will give you a run down on your timetable OK" It seemed that my daily routine was very much as I had been used to in my earlier Messman days apart from the door of my room being unlocked at 0630 each day. I would then go down to the main galley to collect the staff breakfasts which I would take back to the Instructors Quarters,. I would then lay up the Dining Room for the Duty Instructor's

breakfast. The inmates were awakened at 0645 for ablutions and 'slopping out'. Breakfast was at 0700 followed by inspection of 'rooms' If there were any irregularities revealed, the miscreants were 'doubled around' the parade ground obstacle course several times.

By 0800 sharp the entire Staff including those who were RA and inmates would be on Morning Parade and Colours when 'Tiny' himself would appear. After which all the inmates would double around the assault course for one hour. The legendary 'Tiny' was a huge man by any stretch of imagination and standing well over 6'4" in height was an awesome man. Immaculately dressed in the uniform of a Royal Marines Warrant Officer he was an imposing figure with a loud booming voice to match and the inmates were almost terrified of him as he ran the establishment with a rod of iron and to cross his path was not advisable. Colours and Morning Parade over all the inmates would be 'doubled around' for at least a further hour until detailed finally for 'work stations' for the remainder of the morning until lunchtime at 1300. Following lunch and promptly at 1345 all the inmates who were 'smokers' were fallen in on the Parade Ground at the 'double' and whilst still 'doubling' an Instructor would pass around the ranks issuing a cigarette to each man. One man would then be detailed to go into the 'stoke hold' and grab a shovel full of hot embers from the furnace then still 'doubling' would pass among the ranks. Each man still 'doubling' would then bend down, cigarette in mouth towards the hot embers on the shovel in order to light the cigarette in his lips. This was quite a bizarre ritual which I, as a non smoker could only marvel at. The inmates would then 'halt' and puff furiously for the next 2 minutes before another Instructor passed among the ranks with a tin containing water into which each man would drop his cigarette either finished or unfinished. The inmates would then be 'doubled' back into their respective rooms until 1400 when they were 'turned to' for further 'drills' followed by more work until secure at 1800 to collect their 'pails of water' for the night.

The contents of each individual cell or room were Spartan to say the least and consisted of a wooden bed, two woollen blankets and a pillow without pillowcase. There was a wooden table with 2 drawers and a chair, metal toilet bowl with lid, bucket of water with lid and metal basin, metal mug and plate, plastic knife, fork and spoon. The water was both for drinking and, washing and was replenished each day. In each cell there was a small wooden box containing fine powdered 'brick dust' which was used to polish and almost burnish the bucket, basin and metal mug until they gleamed. The only reading material allowed was the Holy Bible by kind permission of 'Aggie' Weston's. Each Monday, Wednesday and Fridays inmates were allowed to shower and 'dhoby' their kit which was then hung in a drying room on the ground floor next to the showers. Inmates who carried out 'dirty jobs' during the day, were allowed extra shower facilities. The only washing soap allowed was 'Pusser's Hard' The meals were extremely frugal and breakfast was always porridge reminiscent of 'Dickensian Gruel' two slices of bread and butter washed down with a mug of tea. Lunch was usually a variation of vegetable stew and potatoes again with two slices of bread and butter and a mug of tea. Teatimes varied slightly from the usual two slices of bread and butter coated with jam or lemon curd to herrings in tomato sauce, a real naval delicacy. The exception to this was only on Sundays when there was actually a small roast and when I say small I really mean small followed an equally small dessert, usually 'Pusser's Duff' and custard. At week ends the discipline was slightly more relaxed with only one session on the Parade Ground Assault Course before prayers and Sunday Divisions when the Padre from nearby RNB took the service. Books were allowed at week ends only, no newspapers or magazines and rooms were inspected daily.

During my second day at the 'Dockyard Hotel' whilst collecting the Staff breakfasts I recognised an old oppo 'Banjo' Bartlett a PO Chef from my days at Daedalus back in 1953

'Banjo', now a Chief Chef had been a good mate and got a wink and nod of the head indicating me to come into the back of the galley out of sight and earshot. A firm handshake told me that I had not been forgotten and a quick conversation told me to ask for anything that I needed. What a stroke of luck I thought, fancy old 'Banjo' a Chief now and I found myself thinking of the old times we had enjoyed together back at 'Lee' Banjo busied himself for several minutes piling foodstuffs into a large cardboard box which he placed on a galley trolley together with the breakfasts. "You've done me a few favours in the past old mate, the least I can do is see you right now" Said old 'Banjo' with that familiar toothy grin of his "Anything you need JR, just tip me the wink" He whispered. Back in the Instructors Quarters with breakfast I unloaded 'Banjo's' treasures. All the essentials were there, tea, coffee, sugar, milk bread, fresh bread rolls, biscuits, bacon, eggs and assorted tinned foods. There was even lavender scented polish and air fragrance. I smiled. "Good old 'Banjo' just like old times again. I soon settled down into the old Messman routine which even the RA men could not ignore. There was always the fascinating smell of fresh coffee and bacon rolls at 'Stand Easy's' and even hot sausage rolls and oggies appeared by courtesy of the small 'Baby Belling' oven in my pantry. I instinctively knew that my work was appreciated when Harry began to leave a tot of 'Neaters' in the fanny each day. After a few days I was even excused 'Daily Drills' as they interfered with my routine of home comforts for the Staff. Even 'Tiny' himself was prone to drop in for his 'Stand Easy' bacon roll. As an additional reward for my efforts which I know everyone really appreciated, I was allowed to read a daily newspaper and even have a shower.

My couple of weeks were soon up and one Friday morning Harry quietly told me to pack my gear and get ready to leave the 'Dockyard Hotel' a day early if I wished so that I could get back to Blackcap before the week-end. He said that my release would be dated for Monday and placed in the Internal Mail to the Captain of RNB who would receive it on Monday morning. This was a wonderful gesture on his part which I really appreciated and an even more memorable gesture was when every single one of the Staff Instructors apart from 'Tiny' shook hands and wished me well. Just one final thing to do and that was to thank my old oppo 'Banjo' in the Galley for everything as without his help it would have been really hard for me. By lunch time all my chores were done. I had pressed my uniform and retrieved my holdall and personal effects as Harry solemnly handed me my Railway Warrant. All the Staff gathered for their daily tot and an empty glass was soon filled for me. I could never attempt to describe the feeling that I had at that moment as they all wished me good luck and safe journey. Glasses drained and Harry broke the silence. "I suppose you want a f.....g lift to the Station do you"? Everyone laughed. "No thank you Sir, I think I will enjoy the walk". I answered. "You'd better leave by the back door and go through Unicorn Gate, come on then" Said Harry as we walked through out of the Mess for the very last time. We paused again at the huge gate at the far end of the Parade Ground as Harry unlocked the smaller gate. "I'll tell the Joss at Blackcap you are on your way" He said. A final handshake and a smile and he was gone, never to be seen again and I stood alone outside those forbidding red brick walls. Free at last I thought all debts paid and the slate wiped clean and whatever fate had lined up for me. I was however, determined never to set foot inside the 'Dockyard Hotel' ever again.

The Town Station was only a short walk from the Dockyard's Unicorn Gate and I was in plenty of time for the London train so a quick pint and a copy of the Daily Telegraph was called for. The journey up to 'The Smoke' took just over an hour and a half and with a bit of luck I could just manage to catch the 2.50 from Euston I thought as I settled down to read my paper. The train got to Waterloo in good time and as I walked down the platform I saw

four other 'Sprog' Matelots obviously off for a Long-Week- End leave. Two were from Collingwood and two from Dryad. On spotting me one called out "Oi! 'Stripey' where are you off to"? I spun round and realised that I had still got my GC badge which had never been forfeited. "Euston" I replied. "So are we, they chorused, shall we cop a fast black together" "Seems like a good idea" I answered as one of them collared a taxi nearby. "How much to Euston mate"? Enquired one of the four. " Five bob each hop in " Grinned the Cabbie as we all clambered into the black taxi. My four companions were all trainee 'Sparkers' and Telegraphists. Two 'Scousers' and two from Manchester. The journey to Euston was fairly short and as our train was already in we galloped madly up the platform and grabbed a seat next to the refreshment coach. As there was only a few minutes before departure a couple of my companions decided to queue at the counter. A Steward was busy behind the bar and grinning. "Can't serve you lads yet, not until the train is moving" was followed by groans of disappointment. The Steward glanced at his watch "OK lads we're off what's your poison"? He laughed. The lads returned with armfuls of beer bottles and paper cups which were eagerly grabbed by the rest. "I got a couple for you mate" replied one of the Scousers. I thanked him and got up to visit the still deserted bar myself and returned with one of the large tins of Watney's Red Barrel 'Party Fours' which I plonked on the table amid whistles of approval from my companions. "Here we are lads, this should hold us for a bit" I grinned. "Just in time too" someone remarked as the Bar suddenly became quite busy.

My companions were 'Tommo' and 'Whacker' from Liverpool whilst the other two were 'Bagsy' and 'Shiner' from Manchester. it seemed as they had all joined the Navy on the same day and had travelled down together from their respective Recruiting Offices in Liverpool and Manchester. The two 'Telegs' had apparently done their initial boy's training at HMS Ganges before embarking on their trade training whilst the other two 'Sparkers' had done theirs at HMS St Vincent. They had lots to talk about so I contented myself by reading my newspaper, drinking my beer and occasionally joining in the sometimes animated conversation to which 'Sprogs' are often prone. By the time we reached Rugby I had finished my paper and my mind flashed back to my own days at HMS Gamecock, Bramcote on my initial training and when I used to catch my train from this very station. My companions turned their attention to me and we spent the next hour or so in conversation about respective trades, sea time, ships and a million other things. In no time at all we arrived at Crewe Station and clambered out shouting our goodbyes as we ran to catch our respective trains, theirs to Manchester and Liverpool and mine to Warrington. It was almost six o'clock when my train arrived at Warrington and to my surprise there was a 'Tilly' from Blackcap waiting outside and the familiar face of 'Monster' Cresswell, one of our 'Civvy Drivers from Blackcap. "Who are you waiting for Monster"? I enquired politely. Monster flashed a toothy grin "You, you prat, get in" I scrambled in beside him. "What's all this about then"? I asked, slightly puzzled. Another toothy grin from 'Monster' "It was the Jossman's idea, he thought you might appreciate a lift" I suddenly thought and then the penny finally dropped. Old Harry Glover. Yes of course, he and the Jossman were old mates, he must have phoned him with the train times, the old bugger, bless his heart. Monster Cresswell was a big man with huge hands like dinner plates. He had a large family, all 'Monsters' just like him who lived near the Base. "Well now then Monster, what has been going on since I've been away"? I asked him. "It's been bloody quiet since you've been gone I can tell you" He grinned. "So you've all missed me then"? I laughed "Too bloody right we have and I tell you what, the Joss thinks the sun shines out of your arse too" He laughed. As we neared the Base I asked Monster to drop me off at 'The Thorn' as I wanted to catch up on things and find out what I had been missing.

I entered what I thought would be a deserted public bar to find it jam packed with people. Everyone was there Dutch, Scouse, Taff and the rest of the Buffer's Party. There was the Jossman too holding out a pint of lovely beer for me. The Reg Staff were there, Scouse the Chef, it seemed half the bloody base was there and a loud cheer greeted me as I entered the bar. The Landlord grabbed my holdall and stuffed it behind the Bar and indicated a nearby table loaded with a 'Big Eats Buffet' and to which my entrance had encouraged a general 'free for all' Dutch, knocker and Taff motioned me over to a nearby table where we hastily endeavoured to catch up on the activities of 'Our Network' which apparently was still ticking over despite my short absence. The Jossman, who had been standing at the Bar, motioned me over and we sought a slightly quieter spot near the door. He patted me on the back and whispered. "I wanted you to know that we all really appreciated what you did and I hope things were not too bad for you down there" I smiled at him. "You are a crafty old sod Joss and no mistake, your old mate Harry was a real diamond" "How is the old bugger" The Joss enquired. "Harry is fine and sends his regards, by the way I knew Harry on board 'Albion' The Joss stared at me for a moment. "I didn't realise that you knew him before" He said. I just smiled back. "You don't know everything Joss do you"? The Jossman drew me a little closer. "How long will it take for you to close down operations if you know what I mean" I looked puzzled. "I'm not quite with you Joss" I replied. "We've all got a 'Draft Chit' is what I'm trying to say" He hissed. "What do you mean all"? I enquired suspiciously. "I mean all, the lot of us, 'Buffer's Party' Reg Staff, most of the Fire Station, some Senior Rates, Officers and I almost forgot, you too"! "Me" I spluttered. "Especially you" Replied the Joss. "When, and where" I enquired. "Trying to sound casual. "You've got a sea going to Victorious down at Pompey" The Joss replied. "Bloody Hell Joss, I've just come from there" I said. "It so happens that we've all got sea goings too, it seems as though they are having a general clear out and it's probably just as well" The Joss opined. "When"? I asked resignedly. "You've all got about six weeks" Said the Joss taking a gulp at his beer. "No one knows yet so don't say anything until AFO's come out next week" Said the Joss. "How the bloody hell do you know then"? I asked suspiciously. "You don't bloody know everything do you JR" He mimicked. The homecoming party at 'The Thorn' as expected was a huge success but I had a lot of thinking to over the week end.

Deciding to swear Dutch and Knocker to secrecy we began to close down our activities on the pretext that things had become simply 'Too Hot' and we should all get out whilst the going was good. The general consensus of opinion among the 'Buffer's Party and 'The Network' was that it was probably a good idea. After all, everyone has had a bloody good run out of it. We immediately set about disposing of all our assets. Lockers, storerooms, hidden caches, secret hidey holes, booty from the American Base every single thing which might embarrass or possibly incriminate anyone was disposed of. There were of course the odd perks which just had to continue, namely the weekly meat supplies to the Base, the placing of daily bets, firewood and fuel and type of essential home comforts which the Base occupants had come to expect. Sadly, the once flourishing trade with the American Base was terminated but occasional transactions still took place off Base, usually in some quiet country lane or nearby village pub where no questions were asked. When Dutch, Taff and I eventually did a 'stock take' we immediately decided to hold a clearance sale. One of course had to be careful so the chosen venue was my cousin's Working Men's Club about 10 miles away on a Saturday morning using the Buffer's Party 3 ton truck we managed to smuggle everything out of the Base without arousing too much suspicion. If anything was noticed at all, I'm certain that a deep sigh of relief was finally felt by everyone. Fortunately my cousin saved us from prying eyes by holding the sale inside his club, thereby ensuring that it was private and where any surplus American booze and cigarettes could safely be

raffled off to the members. The remainder of the stock including 'Pusser's bicycles accumulated from the days of the operational squadrons, bits of old aircraft, assorted vehicle tyres, American war surplus items, metal lockers, cutlery and general bric a brac went like hot cakes and by lunch time everything had gone. A tidy profit was made so we felt that a round of drinks in my cousin's club was called for. By 1330 we were back at Blackcap enjoying a quick shower and change then a couple of pints in 'The Thorn' whilst waiting for Naylor's bus to take us to the Wilderspool Stadium to watch Warrington play Rugby League. The ensuing six weeks simply flew by and soon it was the morning of our 'Drafts' and at 0900 everyone assembled on the Parade Ground with their kit awaiting transport to the Railway Station and It seemed as though the entire Base had been drafted. My old oppo Scouse who had been just about everywhere with me including Lee, Siskin and Albion was going to Victorious with me. Outside the Main Gate just about everyone in the local area including the residents of 'The Thorn' including the Landlord and his wife who were both carrying pails which turned out to be full of beer. Some of the lads went over to them at the Main Gate and glasses were filled and just as quickly emptied despite the early hour. Soon everyone was loaded onto the waiting transport and amidst loud cheers from everyone pulled away from the Gates. There wasn't a dry eye anywhere as most of us were extremely sad to leave and the local population just as sad to see us go. We all agreed that dear old Blackcap had been good to everyone but all good things must come to an end and what new challenges lay just around the corner, whatever they may be I hope they are just as profitable. "Look out 'Victorious here we come" Bawled Scouse.