

TURNED OUT LICE AGAIN

The spirit of camaraderie within the Royal Navy and Armed Forces in general is the stuff of legend and in particular within the ranks of the Fleet Air Arm, Aircraft Handlers who's code is to share just about everything with one's oppos from beds, bunks, hammocks, clothes, daily tot, money and even girl friends.

One such memory springs to mind whilst I was at HMS Heron, the Royal Naval Air Station at Yeovilton in 1953. At the time I was awaiting a draft to HMS Curlew or the RNAS at St Merryn in Cornwall for an Armourers Course. The Fleet Air Arm Ordnance School, previously based at HMS Heron was in the process of being re-located to St Merryn and I was one of several temporarily attached to the Fire Station or Watch Keeping Duties. The Aircraft Handlers Fire Station Mess in those days was situated behind the Main Guardroom.

My first impression of Aircraft Handlers was that they were completely mad. Despite this a tremendous spirit of friendship existed between them with good humour providing the basis and which seemed continuous. Everyone was expected to join in and to my recollection did so with gusto. The Fire Station operated a system of 24 hours on duty and 24 hours off duty. The off duty periods being the delights of nearby Yeovil or the surrounding counties of Somerset and Cornwall where one could reasonably be expected to return with 24 hours.

In one of the nearby villages there were a couple of quite attractive sisters who lived together in one of the cottages. The sisters adored Sailors and most of the Ships Company at Yeovilton had at some time sampled their favours and general hospitality and accordingly the sisters were very popular. One morning after breakfast there was a buzz of almost feverish activity in the Fire Station as one of the lads returning from shore leave discovered that he had unwelcome guests around his pubic regions. Being Handlers the incident could not possibly remain secret for long and the almost gleeful shouts indicated that "Oi lads, Florrie's got 'crabs"! "What"? Demanded another "Florrie's got mechanized dandruff" Shouted someone else. A totally ashamed and crestfallen Florrie was compelled to bare all for the inspection of his colleagues, most of who had mysteriously disappeared as if they suddenly had to be somewhere else.

As if by magic dhoby buckets appeared from nowhere and there was a hive of activity everywhere. Even the sinks containing the 'Fearnought Suits' in the process of being re-proofed were unceremoniously emptied to be quickly replaced by, sheets, pillowcases and blankets. Even long overdue lockers full of overalls, underwear and long forgotten objects were swiftly located and subjected to the most rigorous scrutiny. Nothing was left to chance and for the next two hours the Fire Station was transformed into something resembling a disturbed ant hill as the news of Florries misfortune spread like wildfire around the Base. One can only imagine a reciprocal kind of activity which followed on the Main Base when the news was received, after all, the two sisters had been enjoyed by just about everyone stationed there.

In the midst of all this hygienic mayhem a very disconsolate Florrie sat on his bed currently divested of it's mattress which was slowly being doused with 'Lysol' and systematically beaten to death with broom handles.. Order having eventually been restored in the Fire Station Mess, one of the more senior hands to whom I shall only refer to as 'Lofty' so as not to disclose his identity, put a distant but fatherly hand on Florrie's shoulder.

An almost tearful Florrie revealed that he was supposed to go on Long Week End Leave this very week end and that his girlfriend might not take kindly to his failing to consummate their relationship particularly as the treatment usually involved shaving off all pubic hair which of course might invite embarrassing questions. Now Lofty being a most experienced man of some stature and repute in such matters decided to offer advice that all was not lost. Explaining to Florrie that he had tried and tested the remedy that he was about to suggest. A now quite desperate Florrie was prepared to agree to anything in order to guarantee the removal of the uninvited guests.

Having gained the confidence of a rather apprehensive Florrie and with the assistance of a couple of the Fire Station Handlers and with the time old adage of "Trust me I'm a Handler and know about these things"! Florrie allowed himself to be strapped to his bed and blindfolded. There followed hurried whisperings among the onlookers which caused temporary alarm to the pinioned and now helpless victim. Continuous assurances however appeared to win Florrie over and he seemed to relax and await this miraculous cure which would solve all his immediate problems.

Lofty, being Lofty, disappeared for a few minutes reappearing with a bucket containing a clear liquid with the strangely familiar smell of 'White Spirit'. Approaching the group by the bed containing the hapless Florrie, Lofty suggested covering Florrie's eyes with a towel to prevent eye contamination. Ordering one of the lads to unbutton Florrie's overalls from neck to crutch and with the reassuring remark that "This might sting just a bit but it will do the trick" Lofty disgorged the contents of the bucket in the direction of Florrie's now exposed private parts. There was a pause of at least five seconds amidst the eager anticipation of the assembly around Florrie's bed before all hell seemed to let loose. A high pitched scream from Florrie followed by the iron bed almost leaving the floor by levitation as it began to lurch from side to side like a ship in a rough sea as the prostrate and hog tied Florrie thrashed around madly. The astonished bystanders quickly released his hands and feet and the now almost demented Florrie dashed outside and hurled himself into a nearby Static Water Tank which afforded him some temporary relief.

Florrie's messmates were convulsed with laughter as poor old Florrie scrubbed madly at his nether regions for several minutes before being helped out of the water and quickly divesting himself of his overalls and sea boots. Towels were brought and all hands began to offer a advice and assistance. A now thoroughly dried Florrie still wincing watched by his eager messmates examined the damage to his anatomy. More gasps of astonishment turned to sympathy as Florrie gingerly revealed the cause of his discomfort to his colleagues. Almost the entire pubic area had been burned off and his manhood at least was looking decidedly sorry for itself to such an extent that it was decided a visit to Sick Bay was called for.

Subsequent treatment at the hands of a female Sick Berth Attendant caused him further embarrassment and to add insult to injury poor old Florrie's had his forthcoming week-end leave stopped whilst he recovered from his ordeal. As for Doctor 'Lofty' he very quickly decided to change duties with one of the Duty Crash Crew on the airfield. He did however atone for his misdeeds by giving Florrie his 'Tot' for a week thereby ensuring almost eternal friendship.

