

## CHAPTER 6 – HMS TERROR Fleet Clearance Diving Officer

### Long Distance Travel by Air

We left Brize Norton just after lunch on Monday 21<sup>st</sup> October. We stopped in Bahrain eight and a half hours later for the VC 10 aircraft to refuel in the middle of the night.



Then three hours on to RAF Gan on the Maldiv Islands in the middle of the Indian Ocean. Finally, in the early hours of the morning we took off for Singapore where we arrived six and a half hours later at 4.30pm local time on 22nd October. We were met by one of my Dartmouth contemporaries, Mike Shallow, who advised us to “move slowly” because of the intense humidity!

### Singapore Transport and Temporary Accommodation

We had to make our own arrangements for accommodation on arrival and one of my diving officers had arranged a short term let. The bungalow at 59, Jalan Kemuning was quite small but at least it was close to the naval base. Sonia remembers being fascinated by the torrential rain that seemed to start at 4 o'clock every afternoon!



My predecessor had already sold me, unseen, a small Standard car which we nicknamed “Stanley” It was a bit old and battered but reasonably reliable.

**Our bungalow**



**Left:- Stanley (bought from Graham Shaw and sold to Jack Birkett!)**

To take advantage of tax exemption, we had arranged for a VW Passat estate car to be shipped direct from Germany to Singapore but it was not due to arrive until December.

One of our priorities was to find a house with a bit more space but still near the naval base. In the meantime, I had to find out about being on the staff of a Vice Admiral commanding the Far East Fleet!

## CHAPTER 6 – HMS TERROR Fleet Clearance Diving Officer

### Singapore Naval Base and Married Quarters

The Naval Base stretched for about five miles along the North shore of Singapore Island.

The West end was next to the causeway joining Singapore Island to Johore Bahru on the mainland of Malaysia.

**Right:- At the East end of the Naval Base was the Naval Dockyard.**



**Left:-  
The Headquarters Building  
for the Far East Fleet**

The whole area included the Fleet Headquarters building as well as the Fleet Diving Centre which was my territory, and many Married Quarters (MQs). These ranged from the Vice Admiral's house with its private swimming pool and tennis court, to detached bungalows and blocks of flats.

There were never enough MQs for everyone, so at first we all had to rent accommodation privately and go on a waiting list. Everyone's appointment lasted for exactly 30 months and you had to have at least 6 months left to be eligible for a MQ. So, after 24 months in Singapore many people were taken off the waiting list and the rest moved up! We were lucky and got a MQ after just 18 months.

# CHAPTER 6 – HMS TERROR Fleet Clearance Diving Officer

## The Fleet Diving Centre

This was the base for my Fleet Clearance Diving Team, comprising up to six self-contained units, and also the Far East Diving School.

## A Vast Geographical Area of Responsibility

I was responsible for Diving and Explosive Ordnance Disposal (or Bomb Disposal) everywhere “East of Suez”!



At various times I had units in South Korea, with the South Korean Navy; in the Gilbert and Ellice Islands, reef-blasting; in Queensland, with the Royal Australian Navy; in Mombasa, Kenya, changing a frigate’s propeller; in Mauritius marking British Sub Aqua Club exams; in Hong Kong, for ship inspections; in Fiji for more reef-blasting; and when the ENNERDALE sank, in the Seychelles.

## The legacy of the Second World War

The Diving Centre had inherited some curious left-overs from the war. We had a Japanese Compression Chamber with the original brass tallies to identify valves. Happily, these had been joined by tallies in English.



**Above:- The Japanese Chamber**

**Left:- RN Diving Tender DIVER**

We also had an ex-German Navy diving tender called DIVER, soon to be replaced by a brand new vessel built for us in Singapore. This had labels in German only but the diving team seemed to have learnt enough German to find their way about!

## CHAPTER 6 – HMS TERROR Fleet Clearance Diving Officer

November 1968 – Diving at Pulau Tioman



**Pulau Tioman**

I took our diving tender DIVER with a team of divers to the island of Pulau Tioman of the East Coast of Malaysia and found it just as beautiful as when the film South Pacific was made there.



**The water was very clear and**



**We used to collect coral**

At Pulau Tioman we finished our stock of canned Tiger beer. However, as luck would have it, on the way back, passing the NAAFI Club at RAF Changi, I accidentally ran DIVER aground on a soft mudbank! Luckily, the tide was coming in and we would float clear in about twenty minutes. This was just time for my divers to lower a rubber dinghy, speed in to the jetty, buy a couple of crates of beer and get back on board before we were able to leave. The RAF witnesses thought the navy divers were simply taking advantage of their NAAFI facilities!!

# CHAPTER 6 – HMS TERROR Fleet Clearance Diving Officer

## December 1968 – A Visit to Hong Kong



**Kai Tak airport**

Early in December I flew to Hong Kong for my first of many visits. In those days the approach to Kai Tak airport meant clearing the tops of adjacent flats by a very small margin. Too big a margin and the aircraft could go off the end of the runway into shallow water. When this happened some years later, navy divers were called in to help recover the plane.



Across the harbour the Star Ferries reigned supreme although tiny sampans still took passengers at their own risk! There is now a road tunnel under the harbour and a new international airport has been built.

**Left:- The Star Ferry Terminal**

The Naval Base was called HMS TAMAR and on the waterfront was the navy's NAAFI Club called the China Fleet Club. Shopping was a popular pastime as many electrical goods were cheaper than in Singapore.

**Right:- Morris Minors were very popular!**



## CHAPTER 6 – HMS TERROR Fleet Clearance Diving Officer

18<sup>th</sup> December 1968 - HM Diving Tender DATCHET is named



After sea trials, ↓



she received an identity number!



She was named by the admiral's wife, Mrs O'Brien, who came aboard with everyone else for drinks to mark the occasion!



Left:- Later we painted DATCHET black which was easier to keep clean!

# CHAPTER 7 – REEF BLASTING IN FIJI

## Introduction

During a visit to Fiji my admiral had been told how the economy of small islands depended on copra, the white flesh scooped out of coconut shells. This was dried on each island ready for collection by a small government cargo ship. However, the ship called at the islands with the easiest access for loading so some islands did very badly. The government had a reef-blasting programme to improve access to these islands. The admiral said he would “lend” them one of his diving officers to help! So it was that two months before our first child was due to arrive, I went off for Fiji for an unforgettable period of just over three weeks



**Right:- Fijian Outriggers**

## FIJIAN ISLANDS DIARY

### January 1969

**Tue 7<sup>th</sup>** Left Singapore  
**Wed 8<sup>th</sup>** am Arrived Sydney and toured the city area with friends.  
pm Left Sydney by PanAm flight

**Thu 9<sup>th</sup>** Arrived Nadi Airport, on main island of Fiji. I took an onward flight across the island to Suva, the capital. Where I was met by Stan Brown owner of MARORO and my boss for the visit.



**Left:- Overnight at the Tradewinds Hotel. Posted letter to Sonia with colourful stamps.**

# CHAPTER 7 – REEF BLASTING IN FIJI

## FIJIAN ISLANDS DIARY (Continued)

**Fri 10<sup>th</sup>** Joined MARORO to sail at 12.30. She used to be the Royal Yacht of Queen Salote of Tonga and was bought by Stan Brown for work around the islands.



**MARORO (Meaning Flying Fish)**



**Route of MARORO in January 1969**

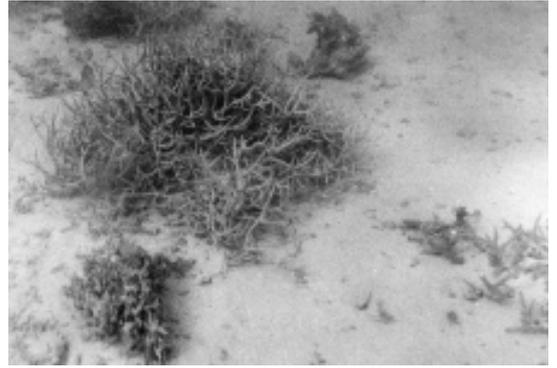
# CHAPTER 7 – REEF BLASTING IN FIJI

## FIJIAN ISLANDS DIARY (Continued)

**Sat 11<sup>th</sup>** Late evening, we arrived at Vanua Balavu in the Lau Group

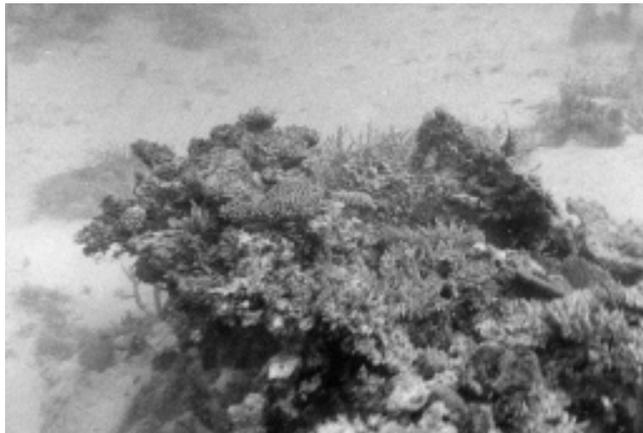
**Sun 12<sup>th</sup>** Stan gave me a familiarisation dive on coral and poisonous shellfish, like the stonefish, which were very hard to see.

**Mon 13<sup>th</sup>** We moved MARORO to a “hurricane anchorage” and I walked across the island to the town of Loma Loma.



I bought a “first day cover” of the new decimal currency stamps that still used the old pictures!. My airmail letter reached Sonia 14 days later.

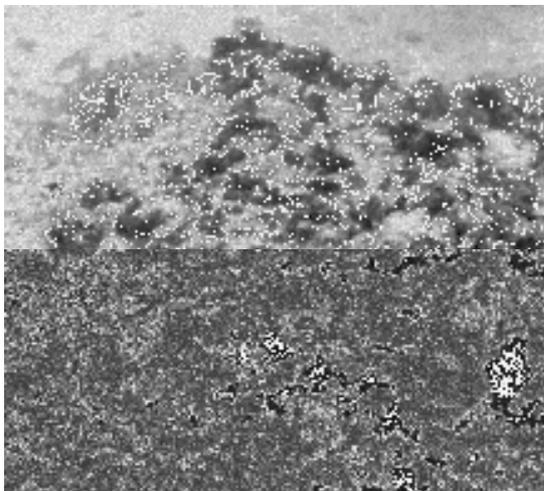
**Tue 14<sup>th</sup>** Started blasting two new boat passages through the coral reefs round islands South East of Loma Loma



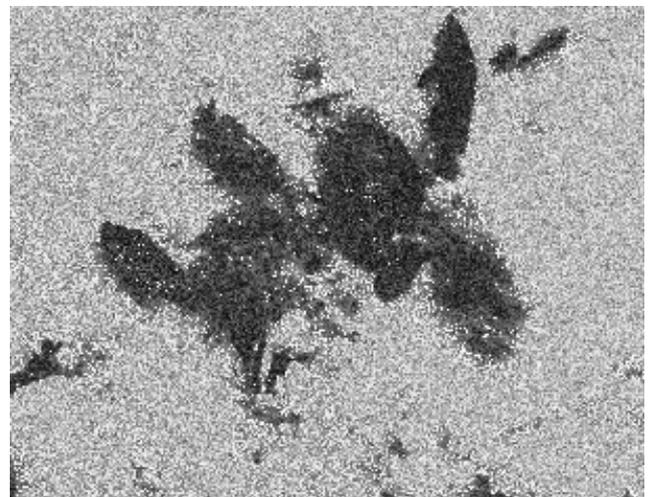
**Coral is still a hazard**



**Bang!**



**Coral flattened**

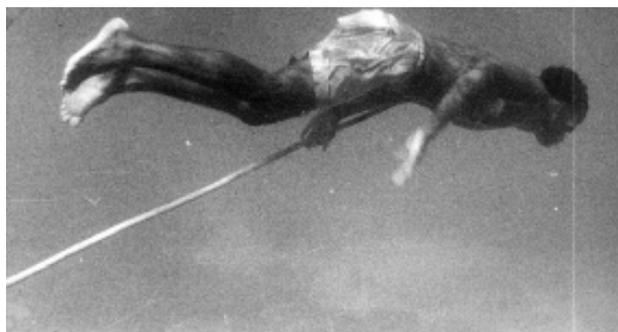


**Fish Stunned**

# CHAPTER 7 – REEF BLASTING IN FIJI

## FIJIAN ISLANDS DIARY (Continued)

**Wed 15<sup>th</sup>** Finished blasting – Lunch ashore with the mother of last year’s Fijian beauty queen, “Miss Hibiscus 1968”. The menu included Land crab, avocado and bread fruit.



**Ready!**



**Steady!**



**Got it!!**

**Thu 16<sup>th</sup>** Sailed South to Tuvuca (pronounced Too-voo-thah).



**MARORO under sail**



**Stan Brown**



**Approaching land**

# CHAPTER 7 – REEF BLASTING IN FIJI

## FIJIAN ISLANDS DIARY (Continued)



The small wooded island of Tuvuca had a population of 160 and only one village. The primary school has two teachers and 25 pupils in 8 year groups.

When I landed with Stan Brown we moved into a one room beach bungalow with our food, explosives, and diving gear and our cook. The Fijian crew sailed MARORO to a safe anchorage at the nearest island, Katafanga and were told to come back to collect us on 19<sup>th</sup>.

### The Village

#### Life on Tuvuca



**The island's river was the only source of water and we worked from the beach**

We kept our explosives on the beach and dived from an outrigger canoe with a native crew. During our entire trip we used 1,000 lbs of gelignite to break up the coral in entrance passages. At Tuvuca we were able to let the government ship get within 100 yards of the beach. Previously the locals had to carry the copra in their outrigger canoes half a mile to the ship and go half a mile back again for the next load!

#### **Right:-**

Our cook, Eteh, was from the Gilbert and Ellice Islands, North of Fiji. He prepared our meals in a corner of the only room.



## CHAPTER 7 – REEF BLASTING IN FIJI

### FIJIAN ISLANDS DIARY (Continued)

Sat 18<sup>th</sup>



**Stan and I had saved two bottles of Guinness for the end of the week**

As this was our last evening we were treated to a communal evening meal followed by the school children performing a Fijian “meke” or mime dance. They acted our work of the previous days and jumped in the air shouting “bang” followed by pretending to collect the fish stunned by our explosions.



**Fijian children performing a “meke” or mime dance**

## CHAPTER 7 – REEF BLASTING IN FIJI

### FIJIAN ISLANDS DIARY (Continued)

**Sun 19<sup>th</sup>** In the morning there was no sign of MARORO but eventually we got a message on the village Short Wave radio to say that the crew were unable to start the engine and still in Katafanga. Stan then commandeered an outrigger with a crew of three to take us over there.



We were twenty miles from Katafanga and it took us five hours to get there.



It was fascinating to be in such an ancient design of boat and I had time to think about my three weeks away. Life on Tuvuca was very basic but the inhabitants were always cheerful.

I felt very privileged to take part in an ancient ceremony of the Pacific islands. Stan had briefed me on how to present a parcel of the very special *kava* root to the village chieftain of Tuvuca.

The root was used to make the traditional *kava* drink which we took sitting down with crossed legs in a circle of friendship!

The *kava* is in a big bowl and each person has a half coconut shell to drink from. The effects have been described as “a sense of well-being” and “some numbing”. I attributed the numbing of my legs to my sitting position rather than the *kava*!



## CHAPTER 7 – REEF BLASTING IN FIJI

### FIJIAN ISLANDS DIARY (Continued)

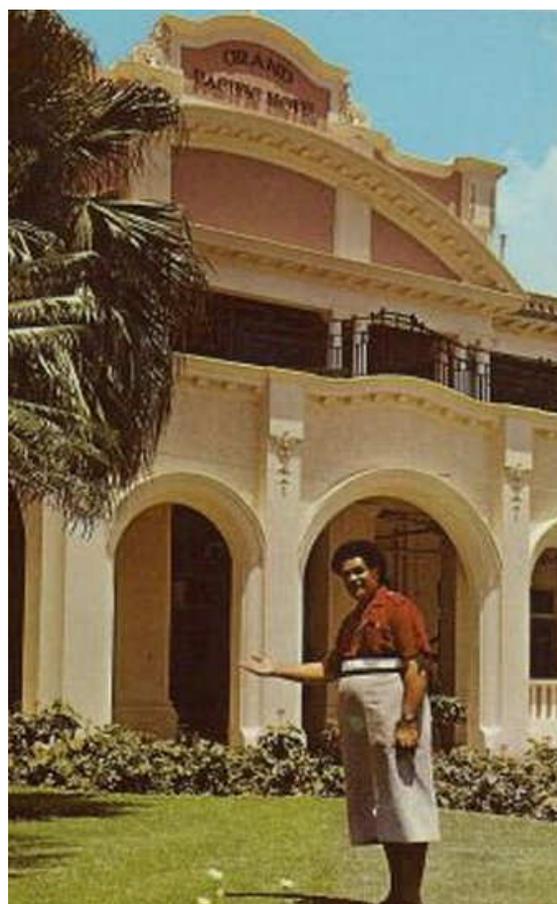
**Tue 21<sup>st</sup>** The engine was fixed and we sailed for Suva.



**Wed 22<sup>nd</sup>** At Suva I spent three nights in the Grand Pacific Hotel (GPH). This Edwardian hotel had been advised to modernise its facilities for American visitors who expected en-suite showers. The management then removed all the existing en-suite baths and replaced them with showers. To avoid waste, the baths were then put around the gardens and filled with pot plants!



**Jennifer and her daughters  
and one of the baths is on the left**



**The Grand Pacific Hotel**

Through Sonia's Aunt Vicky I had been given the address of Jennifer Berry, who had been at school with Sonia. Jennifer lived in Suva where her husband dealt with tropical forestry. I asked her to lunch at the GPH and she came with her two daughters.

## CHAPTER 7 – REEF BLASTING IN FIJI

### FIJIAN ISLANDS DIARY (Continued)

**Thu 23<sup>rd</sup> and Fri 24<sup>th</sup>** We had debriefing meetings with government ministers who were all on first name terms with Stan! I went for one meeting with the Finance Minister. I was greeted by someone who offered me a cup of coffee. When I asked him where the minister was, he said “I am the minister!”

### **A Major Emergency!**

We were told of a major emergency at Fiji’s international airport which was a refuelling stop for all aircraft crossing the Pacific. A replenishment tanker had dragged the refuelling mooring in heavy weather and ruptured the fuel line leading to the airport storage tanks. The airport had just three days of fuel left and more tankers were due imminently. Stan was asked to organise diving assistance as soon as possible to effect repairs. He knew that the only one other diver in Fiji at that time worked on a nearby island as a gardener. He was duly sent for and joined us the next day. On the Friday evening, Stan and I flew across the island to spend three nights in the Hotel Tanoa beside the airport.

### **Sat 25<sup>th</sup> and Sun 26<sup>th</sup>**



**The Hotel Tanoa Bar**

**and one of the rooms**

On the Saturday morning we were joined by the gardener. All three of us worked very long hours and managed to complete a repair by the end of the second day. The work was in quite shallow water and I spent more than six hours diving on one of the days. We had excellent shore engineering support providing improvised equipment. The new pipeline came in sections which had to be supported by floats and towed over the final position before being lowered and connected by a diver. Each float was three 40 gallon oil drums held together by welded angle iron.

**Mon 27<sup>th</sup>** I left Fiji and flew back to Singapore via Sydney

## CHAPTER 10 – HMS TERROR More work and play

February 1969

### Tough Tugs (towed diver vehicles) at Pulau Tioman

This time we went in our new tender, Datchet, to Pulau Tioman. We were doing trials with battery driven vehicles shaped a bit like a short torpedo. They had bicycle style handle bars for control and allowed a diver to move underwater faster than swimming. It was believed they might be useful for divers carrying out underwater searches and later we used them in a training exercise to attack ships.



### A Naval Disaster

On the night of 2nd/3rd June the frigate USS EVANS crossed the bows of the Australian aircraft carrier MELBOURNE and was cut in half with the loss of 73 lives. MELBOURNE arrived in Singapore on 6th June for temporary repairs to her damaged bow.

#### Right:- Above-water damage to Melbourne.

I dived to inspect the underwater damage and had the curious experience of entering her hull three decks below the surface and coming out of the water inside the ship! She left Singapore on 27th June.



Left:-  
Foreground is the stern half of Evans alongside another USN frigate

## CHAPTER 10 – HMS TERROR More work and play

### 1969 Summer Ball Decoration

In an attempt to make our mark on the HMS TERROR Summer Ball I persuaded some divers to help me construct a diving corner. Naturally there were large shells and some coral.

**Right:- The Divers' Corner**



### August 1969 - Diving in Pulau Tioman



I took a team to Pulau Tioman providing safety cover for escape training from my old submarine ORPHEUS. I was able to photograph men leaving the forward escape hatch with expanding air coming out of their special suits.

**Left:-Submarine Escape Training**

**and in The Maldives**

At RAF Gan in the Maldives we did more trials with the Tough Tugs (towed diver vehicles). During this visit I took some black and white photos without any flash at a depth of 170 feet to show how very clear the water was.

**Right:-This photo of a British tanker sunk in World War 2 was published in Navy News.**



### Visiting the Commonwealth Brigade

In September I was flown in an Army Air Corps Beaver to the Commonwealth Brigade at Terendak in South East Malaysia. The brigade had a large proportion of troops from Australia and New Zealand. They were due to move to Penang at the end of the year and to ease the move. Many of them were told to go on leave for the month of November.

**Right:- An AAC Beaver**



## CHAPTER 10 – HMS TERROR More work and play

### Hong Kong again for surprise ship attacks



#### **China Fleet Club and Right:- a Tough Tug**

This time I took a team of divers to carry out a training exercise of coordinated underwater night attacks on ships alongside the shore base HMS Tamar. To add variety to the event I had two divers using battery driven Tough Tugs for their approach and another doing a normal swim. The final attack was a complete novelty. We had a diver fully kitted and ready for the water but sitting in the back of a taxi! The rather bemused driver was told to stop at the corner of the waterfront by the China Fleet Club which was opposite where the target ships were berthed. The diver then stepped out of the taxi and immediately jumped into the harbour to swim a few hundred yards to his target. The ships were briefed to keep a good look out for any possible suspicious activity, but nobody saw the diver leave the taxi! The whole exercise was a great success.



### February 1970 and a mystery trip to Mombasa

I was summoned to the admiral's office for a personal briefing. In Mombasa a sailor in a moored frigate had gone berserk and said he had thrown some bags of top secret code cards over the side! It was impossible to establish if any cards were missing and my task was to organise a detailed search by hand of the area around the ship's position. The ship had sailed but I was to search around another ship berthed on the same mooring and using their diving gear. I was to travel inconspicuously and as soon as possible with the minimum number of divers. I told the admiral that to put a diver in the water I also needed a stand-by diver, two attendants and a supervisor. "That's too many" I was told. "Take three". So I did.

### Missed Flight and Low Finances

I asked the Forces Movements Centre for tickets and was offered Soviet Aeroflot (not good for security!), Czechoslovak State Airlines (not much better) or Air India (Indian Russian military cooperation being a current topic). I chose Air India and in due course we were on our way to Bombay for a brief overnight stop on the Friday with a fresh plane to Nairobi on Saturday. After a few hours sleep we were back at the airport with our bags checked in for the Nairobi flight. We asked our way to the departure lounge and listened to lots of announcements in foreign languages but nothing about Nairobi. Eventually the time for our flight had come and we asked about delays to our flight. It transpired that the plane had taken off on time, with our baggage, and we had been in the Domestic not International Departures lounge!! We were also told that being the weekend, there was no Nairobi flight until 4pm on the next afternoon, Sunday!

I was now faced with a day and a half in Bombay and about £25- sterling in my pocket to cover all four of us. None of the divers had any money as they weren't expecting to need any. Our first move was to ask a taxi driver to take us to where we might find the cheapest possible overnight accommodation. He took us to a boarding house whose owner had lived in Liverpool and was sympathetic with distressed seamen!

## CHAPTER 10 – HMS TERROR More work and play

### Cheap Accommodation

I asked for a cheap room with twin beds and then we asked him to move two more beds into the same room to save money. This arrangement had its drawbacks as anyone wanting to find a loo in the night had to up-end the sleeper nearest the door to get out of the room! However we did have enough money to get some very cheap food the next day. We also spent some hours in a free museum of geology looking at boring displays of rocks and pieces of coal. Earlier on I had found enough money to pay for a telegram to the Naval Liaison Officer (NLO) in Mombasa saying we had been unavoidably delayed in Bombay!

### Arrival at last

In due course we got our onward flight to Nairobi via Karachi and Aden. We were all hungry and had no complaints about the inflight meals. When I reached the office of NLO he was on the telephone but looked up and asked me if I had a briefcase. I showed it to him and he said into the telephone “Yes, the Naval expert has arrived.” I looked puzzled and he said “Don’t you know the definition of a Naval expert? It’s a Naval Officer who is more than 50 miles from his office, wearing plain clothes and carrying a briefcase. I just wasn’t sure about the briefcase!”

### Task completed and delayed return home

We then spent our time searching the seabed around HMS Leopard by hand and finding many empty bottles but no bags of code cards. I had been staying overnight in the Mombasa Club signing in as belonging to Leopard so when I got there on the Thursday evening just after she had sailed I was greeted with some surprise. I explained that I would be leaving the next day in a Hercules aircraft that had come from Singapore to collect us. The next afternoon found me at the airport drinking coffee with one of the aircrew. He asked what plans I had for the evening and I said I rather expected to be airborne. He laughed and said “Don’t be silly. Don’t you know what day it is? We never fly on a Friday 13<sup>th</sup> unless for operational reasons!” We were then told that a minor defect would delay departure by a day. I got home just in time for a St Valentine’s Day evening meal.

### Malaysian Incident



using an Army Air Corps Sioux helicopter.

On arrival, I identified the object as a minesweeping float but it was still an interesting afternoon.

We had a report that a 1000lb bomb had been found on a beach in East Malaysia and the easiest way for me to get there would be by



**Right:- The Minesweeping Float**

## CHAPTER 10 – HMS TERROR More work and play

### RFA Ennerdale sinks



### RFA Ennerdale fully laden with 42,000 tons of fuel oil

On 1<sup>st</sup> June the RFA Ennerdale sank near the Seychelles 15 minutes after striking an uncharted rock pinnacle. The crew left safely in a lifeboat and made their way to Mahe, the capital, about 7 miles away. The sinking posed a severe threat of oil pollution to the islands' developing tourist industry. My deputy took a small team of divers to survey the wreck, travelling by ship from Mombasa as the Seychelles airport was still under construction. I was to await results of the survey and in the mean time carry on with my planned programme.

### At sea in HMAS Melbourne

In the middle of June I aimed to achieve a longstanding ambition to make a flight deck take off and landing. I had arranged three days at sea in HMAS Melbourne and a flight in a four seat Tracker aircraft on 20<sup>th</sup> June.



Tracker aircraft - catapult take-off

and

landing on deck

## CHAPTER 10 – HMS TERROR More work and play

### Urgent Recall

Having already been issued with my flying kit, I had a top priority message from Fleet HQ in Singapore - two hours before take-off for the trip! I was to return there as soon as possible and would be collected by helicopter an hour after I got the message! I was very disappointed to miss my deck landing experience. However, I was fully occupied in packing up my belongings, returning my flying kit and paying my Mess Bill! I was collected on time and en route to Singapore we had to land on a RFA to refuel and have some lunch.

On my return I was told the Ennerdale was lying on her starboard side in about 100 feet of water.



**Ennerdale photographed from the departing lifeboat before sinking completely**

# CHAPTER 11 – RFA ENNERDALE Wreck Demolition

## RFA Ennerdale – Preparations and Plans

I was told to plan how to release 42,000 tons of fuel oil from her tanks while the South East monsoon would continue to blow the released oil away from the islands. This monsoon would only last until October. I would be based in the RFA Stromness which was a “Dry Stores” ship carrying every conceivable item of Naval Stores apart from fuels and explosives.



### RFA Stromness

In the exceptional circumstances, Stromness was authorised to embark explosives. Smaller items such as Plastic Explosives and Detonators would accompany me in a Hercules aircraft from Singapore.

Large charges would be provided by Stromness embarking a complete “outfit” of anti-submarine mortar bombs from the frigate Hermione en route to the Seychelles.

### Right:- HMS Hermione

I was given just one day, 21<sup>st</sup> June, to organise the stores and diving equipment I would need as the Hercules was to leave on 22<sup>nd</sup>. I selected a small team of divers who organised all the diving equipment that would be needed.



### Faulty Explosives??

Before we left there was a disturbing signal from Hermione to say that during the transfer of mortar bombs one had been accidentally dropped into the sea. Apparently it had exploded a short time later. Despite intense discussions none of us in Singapore could explain the explosion which should have been prevented by several safety features. Sonia heard about this after I had gone and was more than a little worried to hear that I might be using defective explosives!

### First landing in the Seychelles

The aircraft crew were known as the Route Proving Crew, being the most experienced in the Far East. Their job was to land and take off anywhere the RAF had never been before. They had surveyed the Seychelles airport after arriving by ship from Mombasa with my deputy and his divers for the initial diving inspection of the wreck. They decided the actual airstrip would be unusable as the final surface was not yet laid. However, the parallel strip of ground had been levelled for buildings and the hardcore foundations was considered fit for a Hercules to land on. The first ever landing was when they recovered my deputy and his divers. The second landing was to be my arrival with the plane full of explosives!

# CHAPTER 11 – RFA ENNERDALE Wreck Demolition

## Flight to the Seychelles



My own flight in a Hercules with the diving team and explosives was due to stop at Gan to refuel and on the way there, I was horrified to realise that despite all our planning, there was no detonating cord (Cordtex) on board the aircraft. The upshot was that I managed to persuade the RAF explosives officer in Gan to let me have a large quantity of Cordtex!

**Left:- A Hercules aircraft**

We then continued our flight to the Seychelles for the second landing on the foundations for the airport buildings. We were all very relieved when the landing went well.

A Wessex V helicopter had been embarked for the operation. We had two pilots, an aircrewman and a Senior Maintenance Rating. On arrival I went on board Stromness with my divers and started making detailed plans with the Chief Officer and my senior helicopter pilot.



**Our Wessex V**

## Board and Lodging

After a week living on board Stromness, it was decided by the Seychelles government that the divers and aircrew should live ashore. The two pilots and myself were provided with a Morris Traveller for transport and accommodated in a small hotel at Beau Vallon, about three miles away from the harbour and across the island.



**Right: Beau Vallon beach**

The divers and aircrew had a Land-Rover and were put into a guesthouse in the capital, Victoria, I saw the manager there to check on services to be provided which included an evening meal. When I cheekily suggested that their board might include a beer with the meal he said that most of his guests preferred wine so perhaps a bottle each evening might be welcome. I said I didn't think a bottle would go very far between six divers, "I meant a bottle each!" he replied.

# CHAPTER 11 – RFA ENNERDALE Wreck Demolition

## Controlling and preventing oil pollution



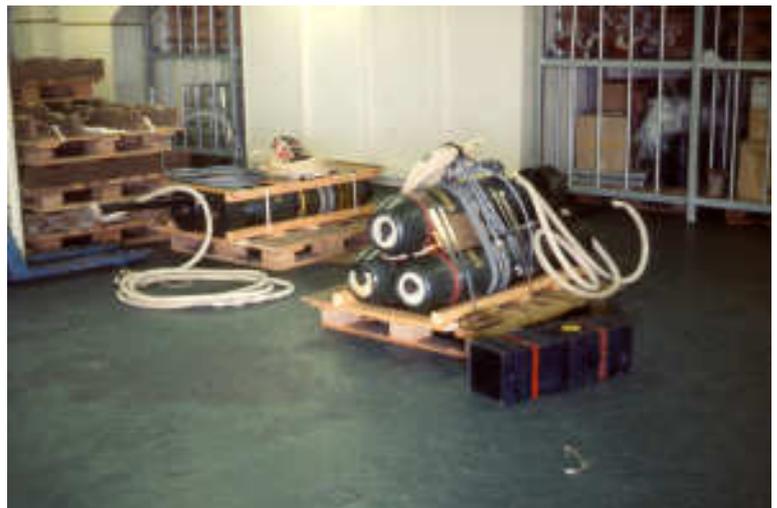
**Distributing detergent to threatened beaches**

The first measure taken was for the helicopter to distribute drums of detergent around the few islands already threatened by leaking oil.

While this might cope with small quantities of oil we planned to release the bulk by blowing holes in each oil storage tank in turn. Most of the tanks held 1,500 tons of oil but the larger ones held 3,000 tons. At the start of each day the helicopter would check that the wind would take escaping oil through a gap between the islands. Then the oil would reach the open expanse of the Indian Ocean where the volatile part would evaporate and the heavy part sink to the seabed.

## The large charges to open each tank

We used three mortar bombs lashed together on a pallet to open each oil tank. This large charge was the equivalent of half a ton of TNT! Each charge had a length of detonating cord protected against chafing damage by a white rubber hose pipe. It was also attached to some rope at regular intervals to prevent it parting under strain.



**Right:- A triple charge ready for use**



**Left:- The charge slung under the helicopter**

I sat in the back holding the coil of detonating cord. We hovered over the appropriate oil tank and when the pallet was dropped I had to let out the cord very rapidly and smoothly. We continued to hover while I attached a detonator and safety fuze. Having lit the safety fuze with a chosen delay of four minutes I dropped it into the water attached to a float. We then climbed to 800 feet which I advised the pilot should keep us clear of the blast.

## CHAPTER 11 – RFA ENNERDALE Wreck Demolition

### The results



**The explosion**



**then the oil started to escape immediately as the smoke blew away.**

After the first couple of charges had been set off we noticed some small white splashes around the area soon after the explosion. With some horror we realised that they were caused by falling shrapnel, which judging by the time delay must have gone much higher than our hover height before falling back into the sea - happily without having hit us! From then on we decided to hover at 2,000 feet when waiting for the bangs!!



**Some small white splashes (of shrapnel)**

## CHAPTER 11 – RFA ENNERDALE Wreck Demolition

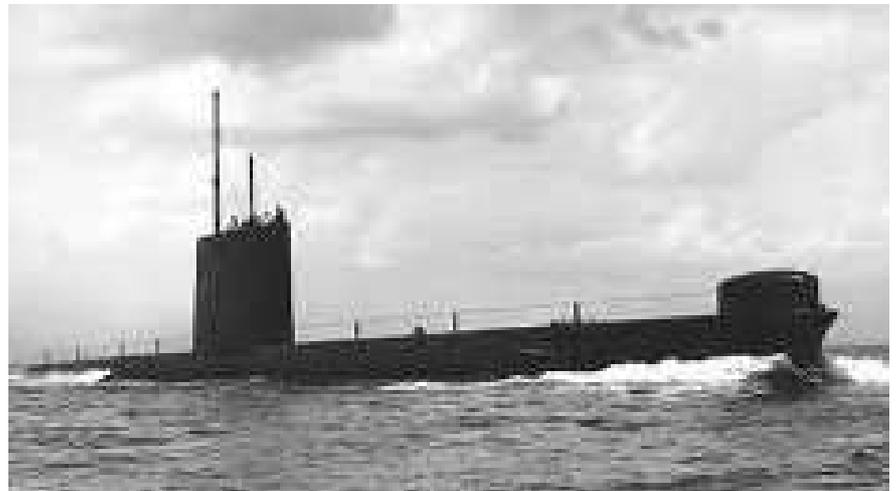
### Progress

By the time we had opened all the port side tanks, the hull looked rather “motheaten”!

We then had to deal with the centre and lower starboard side tanks next to the seabed at a depth of 100 feet. The port side tanks had been only 40 feet below the surface.



### Submarine Torpedo Warheads for the Centre and starboard side tanks



**HMS Cachalot**

Our stock of mortar bombs was not enough to finish the job so the submarine Cachalot was diverted to offload her torpedo warheads for us to use as demolition charges.

**Left:- A torpedo warhead as an underslung load**

Each warhead had the same power as 1,200 lbs of TNT or 20% more than the triple mortar bomb charges we had been using. This proved enough to open the starboard side tanks and the centre tanks just above them.

# CHAPTER 11 – RFA ENNERDALE Wreck Demolition

## Working with Short Delay Fuzes

While I was still using the torpedo warheads, I had another major problem. We had no more safety fuze and I had to use pre-cut lengths from local supplies used for quarrying. Each length provided only a two minute delay which was just half the time I would normally have used.

I decided to overcome this difficulty by dropping the charge as before but without a detonator and safety fuze. I would be able to attach these at sea level, and have time after lighting the fuze to be recovered on the winch wire.

## Attaching the Short Delay Fuzes

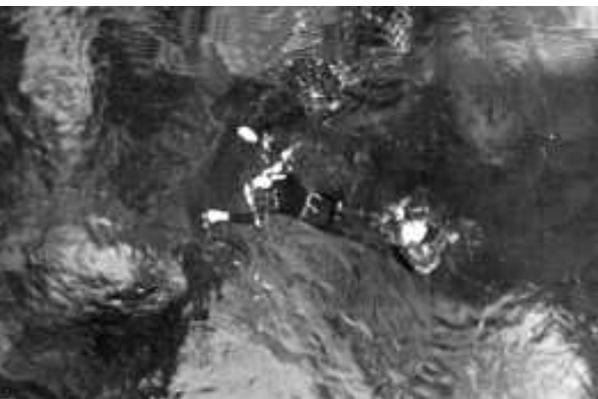
After dropping the charge I lowered the rest of the cord to divers. They had a float attached to the end of the cord and made sure the cord was clear of any snags before leaving the area.

**Right:- Lowering the cord to the divers**



**Right:- So I could easily swim to the float**

The aircrewman and the two pilots watched for me to pull the igniter and then started their stopwatches for the two minute countdown! As soon as I signalled I was ready to be lifted the pilot would descend towards the water and the aircrewman would take in slack on the winch wire so I was hoisted clear on a short length of wire. This was normal drill for recovering someone from the sea.



My next move was to be lowered on the winch wire with the detonator and fuze.

**Left:- to be lowered on the winch wire**

Because of the difficulty of hovering accurately over water I asked the helicopter crew for plenty of slack on the wire so I could easily swim to the float.

## CHAPTER 11 – RFA ENNERDALE Wreck Demolition

### A bad moment!

However on one occasion I had a very bad moment! After lighting the safety fuze and preparing to be hoisted I realised that there was so much slack on the winch wire it had become entangled with the float wire attached to a sinker on the seabed. I spent a very anxious time getting it free as the seconds ticked away. The pilots were no less concerned as they stared at their stopwatches. At last I signalled to be hoisted. The drill already described was abandoned and I had a hair raising ascent from sea level to 2,000feet with the helicopter using full power all the way!! We then watched the explosion from a safe distance.



**From a safe distance**

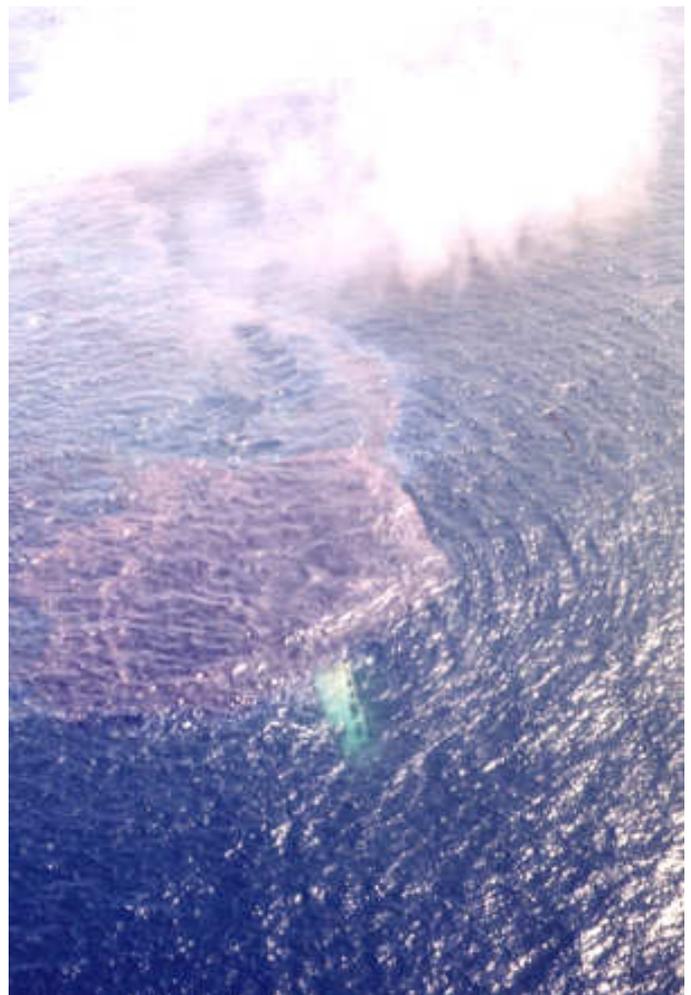
I was told afterwards that we had just 50 seconds to spare!

### Final demolition charges



By now, the wreck was definitely well opened up and most of the fuel oil had escaped.

**Left:- Waves breaking over the wreck**



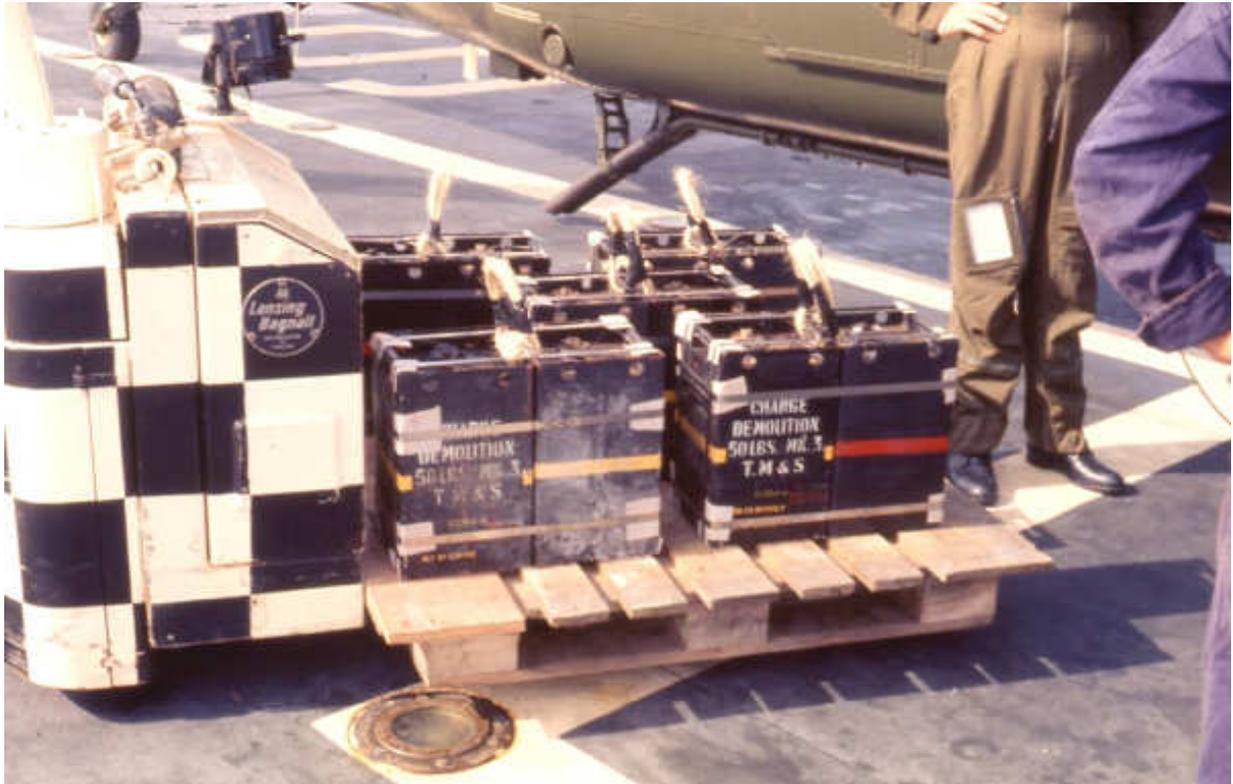
Inside the stern area there was at least one safe which could not be recovered so I was told to make sure no one could possibly get to it later.

**Right:- Some oil still escaping from the lower tanks next to the visible stern area**

## CHAPTER 11 – RFA ENNERDALE Wreck Demolition

### Sealing off the stern area

We prevented access to the stern area by destroying it with a number of conventional large demolition charges supplied as 50 lb blocks which we lashed together in pairs.



### Lashed together in pairs

Because each pair was comparatively small and easy to handle we would load 5 pairs and drop them one pair at a time after lighting the safety fuze in the back of the aircraft. The safety fuzes were lit by pulling a ring and safety pin attached to a spring loaded igniter. Each time I pulled a ring I threw it out of the aircraft door.

### Think before you panic!

On one occasion I panicked because I saw a ring at my feet some time after dropping a charge. I immediately concluded that somewhere a ring had been pulled by accident and a charge could explode at any moment! After a frantic check showed that all the remaining rings were safely in position I realised that the ring must have blown back into the aircraft after I had thrown it out.

### Back home at last!

Early in August the operation of releasing oil from the Ennerdale was completed. My diving team and the helicopter crew were collected by HMS Intrepid for passage back to Singapore. During The first day of the return trip I was summoned to the bridge on several occasions when the captain would hand me a personal signal of congratulation on a job well done! The senders included the government minister for the Navy, the Governor of the Seychelles and my admiral in Singapore. At last, on Tuesday 11<sup>th</sup> August we reached Singapore just over seven weeks after we left.

## CHAPTER 11 – RFA ENNERDALE Wreck Demolition

### Naval publicity

The Far East Fleet published a monthly Public Relations sheet and the next one featured the story of the Ennerdale together with the very apt photo shown here!.



### ENNERDALE BOWS OUT

The Navy's new concept of "bombing" from a helicopter has been successfully employed on the wreck of the RFA Ennerdale which sank after striking a submerged, uncharted coral in the Indian Ocean.

With salvage impossible the 62,000-ton tanker, posing a pollution threat to beaches of the 85 islands of the Seychelles, was broken up and the oil cargo disposed of and dispersed at sea.

Heavy swells and currents prevented divers placing explosive charges on the wreck and mortar bombs and torpedo warheads were lowered from the Wessex and the fuses were activated from the back of the helicopter.

The operation was mounted from RFA Stromness and carried out by navy divers and personnel of 847 NAS and led by Lt - Cdr. Brian Braidwood, FEF Clearance Diving Officer.

### Written Report before any leave

My boss in Singapore was highly pleased with the way the entire operation had been carried out and suggested that I should definitely take a few days leave to recover.

He then said that this would only be possible after I had rendered a complete and detailed written account of the entire task for his inspection! I was horrified as I imagined days spent in writing longhand accounts to be typed up and then corrected by me.

In the event he suggested I use a shorthand typist to take dictation and save a lot of my time. This was the first time I had ever tried dictation but it worked out very well. After working long days on the Wednesday and Thursday the report was finished.

## 1970 November Flood Relief

Immediately after our return from Hong Kong I was sent to look at flood relief in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). The Bhola cyclone which had caused all the damage was the deadliest tropical cyclone ever recorded, and one of the worst in modern times. Up to 500,000 people lost their lives in the storm. The Navy had sent HM ships, Intrepid, Triumph, Hydra, and the RFA Sir Galahad to provide help. I was to represent the Navy in a joint service team flying to Chittagong, the capital, to survey the facilities for receiving further assistance. I was told to have a look over the port facilities and make notes. I assumed I would have to get around on foot without a guide. The aircraft was a Hercules and carried a number of small vehicles.

With me in the aircraft were a Wing Cdr and a Lt-Col of the Royal Corps of Transport. Just before we landed the Lt-Col offered me the use of a Land-Rover and driver as he “happened to have taken two on board in case they were useful!” That solved my transport problem. At the airport we saw German and American aircraft with more relief supplies. Initially we went to meet the local government coordinating team who explained that as this was an annual event they were quite capable of distributing any aid provided to them. Their main worry was the widespread hi-jacking and looting of supply lorries by gangs who sold the cargo on the black market. After a very long day we arrived back in Singapore late in the evening.

## Back to the Seychelles

On 24<sup>th</sup> November I returned to the Seychelles with a diving team to carry out a final survey of the Ennerdale. Since our previous visit the runway had been completed and the local paper reported that our Hercules made a total of four aircraft together at the airport for the first time! Apart from Ennerdale we were to undertake blasting operations to open passages through some reefs. This included widening the channels for the ferry Lady Esme at Baie St Anne on Praslin island and La Passe at La Digue, as well as improving the tanker anchorage by the airport. The diving team got a motor launch from the Port Department and had their own Gemini dinghy. We had no helicopter this time.

## Mahe – the main island

As I was provided with a Mini Moke for personal transport, I was able to look around the main island of Mahe as well as seeing some of the blasting on the other islands.



**Right:- My Mini Moke**



The capital town is Victoria and the harbour area is Port Victoria.

**Left:- Port Victoria**

## Social Life

During our first visit, the pilots and myself had been made honorary members of the Seychelles Yacht Club and the old colonial style Seychelles Club both in the harbour area.



**The Seychelles Yacht Club**



**The Seychelles Club**



**and some members**



**The Bar and**



**The Billiards Room**

Billiards in the club offered a peculiar hazard. Most of the string pockets had perished in the tropical heat so if a ball was potted it would drop to the floor. Failure to catch it quickly let it roll along the sloping floor into the gents' toilet where it was likely to end up in the urinal!

## **Wine in the Seychelles**

I was often asked out for an evening meal and would bring a bottle of wine to say thank you. Actually buying wine was a unique experience. It arrived in the weekly ship from Mombasa. During my visit there was a panic when the ship with wine was delayed for a few days by bad weather and people were restricted to beer! The red wine was either Burgundy or Bordeaux. It came in small barrels or casks and although the shops had some bottles they preferred customers to arrive with their own empties to collect a refill. One afternoon I entered a shop to refill my empty with red wine and asked for Burgundy. The shop keeper turned round and filled my bottle from one of two unlabelled barrels. He then said "Was it Burgundy or Bordeaux you wanted?" - "Burgundy, please" "OK" he said reaching for two piles of labels printed as either Burgundy or Bordeaux. He then took a Burgundy label and stuck it on my bottle!

## **Private Explosives**

It seemed that practically every adult in the Seychelles could buy and use explosives without any obvious check on their competence. They could order gelignite and detonators which were stored in a large space under the Police Commissioner's office until required for use. Later the owner would return any unused items. These were then liable to stay in storage for years on end allowing them to get into a highly dangerous condition. In a tropical climate sticks of gelignite are prone to sweat or weep an explosive liquid which can then crystallise and become very unstable.



**Gelignite sweating**

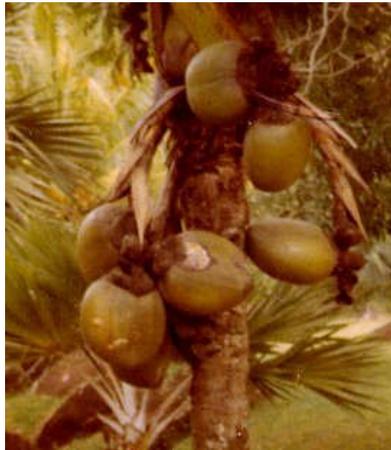


**and crystalline**

One enthusiast of private explosives was the doctor on the island of Praslin. He used them to blast hollow spaces out of the hillside by his house and use the space for a garage or storage. I spoke to his daughter who would collect his gelignite and detonators from the police station and bring them on the inter-island ferry. She explained that she was well aware of the hazards involved and had been given strict instructions by her father. "Always put the detonators in your handbag to keep them separate from the other explosives!"

## Praslin Island and the Coco de Mer

The Coco de Mer is unique to Praslin Island. The male flowers are catkin like, up to a metre long.



The unique double coconut closely resembles a woman's buttocks



Above:- Male flower

Far left:- Fruit

Left:- Nut of a Coco de Mer

## Blasting the islands



The muddy bottom at La Digue and

Right:- The sandy bottom at Praslin



## Back on Mahe



Left:- The crest of the Seychelles boasts a giant tortoise and so

Right:- My divers had a go at riding one.



After a week and a half we flew back to Singapore in good time for Christmas.

## **Sales Trip to India**

In February I joined a Sales Team from the UK to visit Bombay where we would show off the navy's Mine Countermeasures equipment. The MOD (Navy) sent Ian McDonald who was later to feature as the Navy's solemn spokesman during the Falklands War in 1982. He actually proved to be very entertaining company! The manufacturers were Plessey. We had three ships over from the Persian Gulf to take our Indian guests to sea for practical demonstrations.

Ian had arranged to stay in the very expensive and exclusive Taj Mahal Hotel. He told me to stay there as well because he would arrange for my expenses to be covered so I didn't object!



### **The Taj Mahal hotel and the Gateway to India**

#### **The Hotel**

The hotel was very impressive. There was a central spiral staircase that went up about five or six floors. This apparently attracted several suicides each year. In my room was a large pile of towels of all sizes. Outside my door a young boy squatted on the floor. Eventually I discovered his duty. Every time he heard me run some water whether for a shower or just to rinse my hands, he would knock on the door and ask for my used towel so he could replace it. The room was so large that we were able to use it for discussions after each day at sea. There was room to spread charts out on the floor with up to a dozen people seated around them.

#### **The British Naval Attaché**

He was Captain Hans Hamilton, a larger than life figure who was staying with his wife in the Royal Bombay Yacht Club during our visit. He had flown from New Delhi where he worked and his driver had arrived in Bombay with the white Ford Zephyr staff car. Bombay was in a "dry state" but the captain assumed diplomatic immunity by flying a white ensign on the car bonnet and packing a case of Gordon's London Dry Gin in the boot!

## **Sales Trip to India (Continued) - Our Presentation**

Before taking our Indian guests to sea we gave a presentation at Their navy headquarters. This produced an extraordinary embarrassment when the man from Plessey rang up before hand to ask for a 35mm slide projector as he had a lot of slides to show. Apparently there was no slide projector to be found even in the shops that were contacted and in the end we were offered an epidiascope which we associated with Victorian times! For my money, the highlight of the presentation was a speech from Ian McDonald on behalf of MOD Sales telling his audience - in effect - that they could count on every possible assistance (short of actual help). The UK would support them at all times and all places (subject to other commitments) and so on. He sounded so sincere that I had to pinch myself to realise that he had used a good 20 minutes to make absolutely no promises whatsoever. A masterly demonstration of civil service gobbledegook!

## **New Delhi**

After the presentation and demonstrations were over, Ian and I flew to New Delhi with the Naval Attaché whose car had been driven on ahead. We were duly met at the airport and driven to his house. Here his personality was visible when most of his civilian native house staff were lined up outside the house as if on parade and wearing their best pseudo naval uniforms!

## **Homeward bound**

We had an overnight stay in New Delhi and then flew back to Singapore on 18<sup>th</sup> February after eight days away. I was going home to Sonia and Ian was returning to the UK. There was a very nice gesture from the Plessey man just before I got home. He had arranged for a large bunch of flowers to be delivered to Sonia with a message saying "Thank for the loan of your husband!"

## **NOTES TO BE INSERTED AS POSSIBLE!**

### **Geographical scope of the FECDT**

My predecessor Graham Shaw was very involved in the withdrawal from Aden which while being East of Suez was definitely West of Trinco!! Also David Burstall had a big involvement with the Iranian Navy under the Shah.

### **FECDT members**

Lt Tony Lumbard commanded the diving school which didn't prevent him spending a few weeks reef blasting in the Gilbert and Ellice isleands. He also went to Mauritius each year to conduct BSAC examinations and tests. I also had Sub Lt Bill Norton self-termed Fleet EOD Officer or FEODO (aka FIDO). Mick Fellows was one of my Petty Officers who went to Mombasa with me on our abortive search for missing cypher cards!

### **Admiral's Inspection of the Fleet CD Team and Diving Centre**

This occurred soon after my arrival and was really a great credit to my Graham Shaw. I had not had time to change anything much since he left and the admiral had decided that the inspection should be carried out by one of my predecessors, Mike Gillam who was serving with the locally based Inshore Flotilla. His reaction seemed to be that the facilities had improved a lot since his time and the inspection report was entirely satisfactory!

## **Summary**

My 30 months in Singapore provided a lot of travelling, some hard work, much enjoyment

and adventure, and valuable experience of working on an admiral's staff. IN April 1971 I handed over a very depleted diving team to Jack Birkett who then embarked in HMS TRIUMPH for the journey back to the UK as the Far East Fleet finally withdrew.